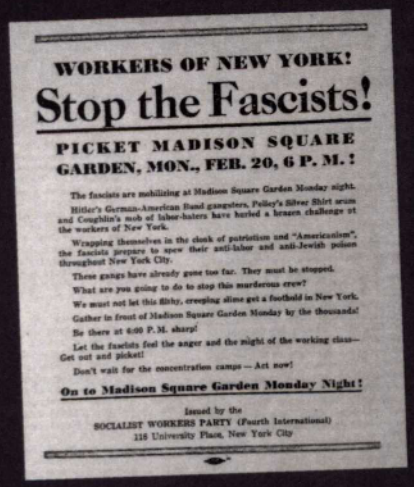
"Through an examination of US fascism and antifascism in the 1930s, Joe Allen highlights the challenges facing today's Left as it confronts the economic and political circumstances that have driven millions to support individuals and organizations that advance racism, sexism and xenophobia." —**Fraser Ottanelli**

BY THE LATE 1930s, the combined forces of German and Italian fascism had scored a series of political and military victories that changed the balance of forces among the world's major powers. Building on his successful occupation of Austria in April 1938, Hitler again triumphed five months later at the Munich conference—which permitted him to occupy the Sudetenland, the German-speaking region of Czechoslovakia. This was the beginning of his march toward the conquest of much of Europe.

For many people, these fascist victories represented a darkening era. Others, however, were inspired by them. "Everywhere the fascists and their fellow travelers seemed to be riding high," James Wechsler recalled in his autobiography, *The Age of Suspicion*. Wechsler was making a living as a journalist in New York, writing for the *Nation* magazine. He was a former student leader at Columbia University and had just recently left the Communist Party. Weschsler was particularly concerned with the street violence of the New York supporters of the Michigan-based fascist priest Father Charles E. Coughlin.


WORKERS OF NEW YORK!

Stop the Fascists!

PICKET MADISON SQUARE GARDEN, MON., FEB. 20, 6 P. M.!

The fascists are mobilizing at Madison Square Garden Monday night.

Hitler's German-American Bund gangsters, Pelley's Silver Shirt scum and Coughlin's mob of labor-haters have hurled a brazen challenge at the workers of New York.

Wrapping themselves in the cloak of patriotism and "Americanism", the fascists prepare to spew their anti-labor and anti-Jewish poison throughout New York City.

These gangs have already gone too far. They must be stopped.

What are you going to do to stop this murderous crew?

We must not let this filthy, creeping slime get a foothold in New York.

Gather in front of Madison Square Garden Monday by the thousands!

Be there at 6:00 P. M. sharp!

Let the fascists feel the anger and the might of the working class—Get out and picket!

Don't wait for the concentration camps — Act now!

On to Madison Square Garden Monday Night!

Issued by the
SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY (Fourth International)
116 University Place, New York City

JOE ALLEN is the author of *Vietnam: The Last War the U.S. Lost*, *"People Wasn't Made to Burn:" A True Story of Race, Murder, and Justice in Chicago*, and *The Package King: A Rank and File History of United Parcel Service*. He lives in Chicago.

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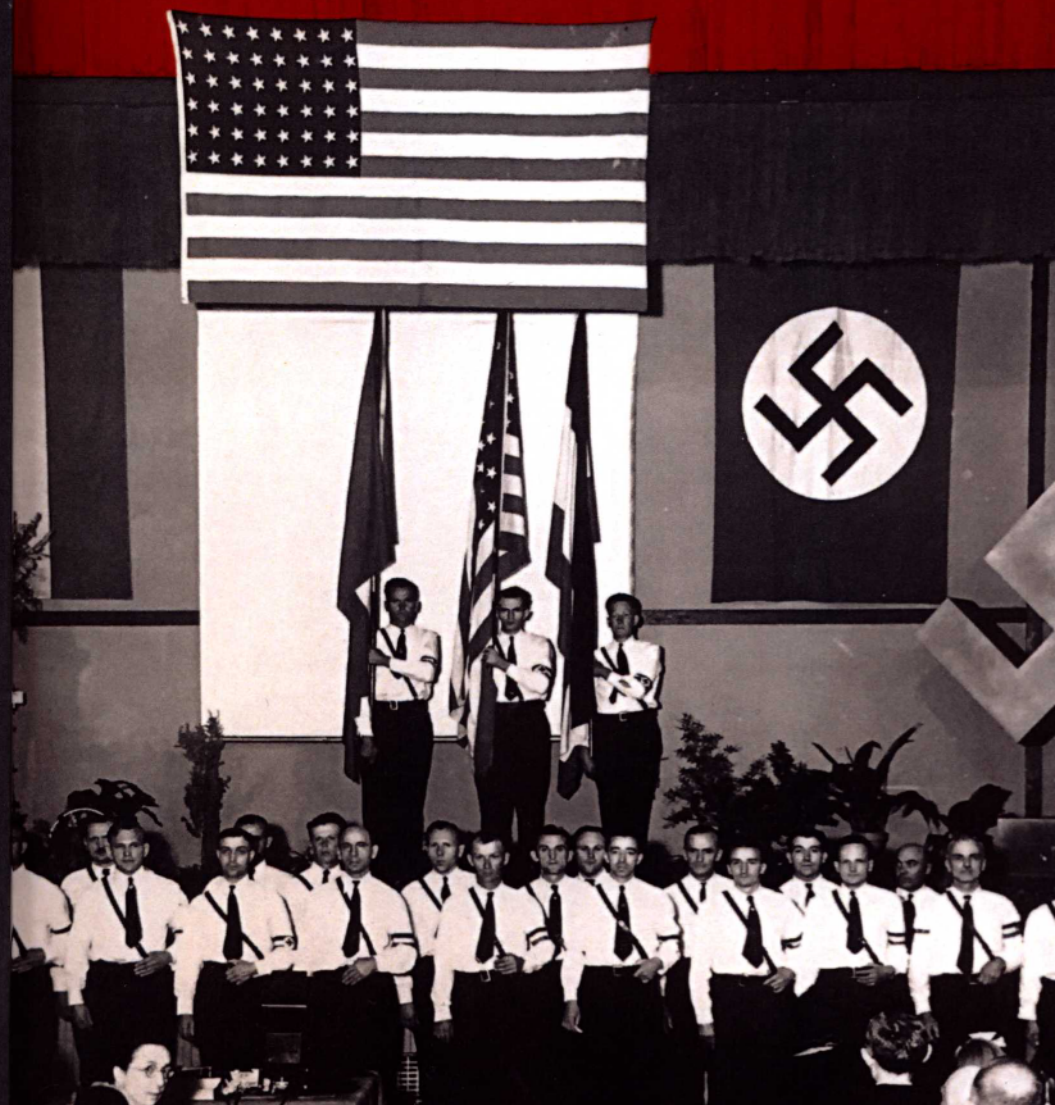
Joe Allen

WHEN FASCISM WAS AMERICAN

ascism and Anti-Fascism in the 1930s



Introduction:

"Thank God for Trump! That's why we love him!"

President Donald Trump recently retweeted racist, Islamophobic videos from the Britain First political party, a Nazi organization based in the UK. American Nazis were ecstatic. Nazi and former Klan David Duke declared, "Thank God for Trump! That's why we love him!" Trump clearly feels the need to periodically feed the worst appetites of Nazi and Fascist supporters in the United States and around the world.

Since Donald Trump launched his presidential campaign in June 2015, Fascism has reared its ugly head with the predictable results of a rise in hate crimes, the murder and physical assaults on anti-Fascist activists, and a worsening political environment for religious and racial minorities in the United States. "We have been awakened," a far-right activist recently told *New Yorker* journalist Evan Osnos soon after Trump announced his presidential bid. We need to push them back underneath the rocks they came from. Knowing our history is vital part of the struggle to defeat them.

This book is a collection of several articles on the history of Fascism and anti-Fascism in the United States in the 1930s. They came to be out of my curiosity, largely in response to growth of European Fascism especially in Greece a few years ago, and the initial response to the Trump presidential campaign. I hope they provide some historical insight into the current development of Fascism and how to fight. Of all of the major capitalist nations, they United States had one of the weakest traditions of Fascism. Has this change? We shall see.

I'd like to thank my editors Paul D'Amato and Bhaskar Sunkara respectively at the International Socialist Review and Jacobin magazine for editing and publishing my material. I would also like to thank those who helped me with research and commentary including Ben Lassiter, Folko Mueller, Dave Riehle, Ben Smith, Patrick M.

Quinn, and Alan Wald. Eric Kerl designed a great book cover. Mistakes of fact or interpretation are my own.

Joe Allen

Chicago, December 2, 2017

It can't happen here? (Part 1)[1]

BY THE late 1930s, the combined forces of German and Italian fascism had scored a series of political and military victories that changed the balance of forces among the world's major powers. Building on his successful occupation of Austria in April 1938, Hitler again triumphed five months later at the Munich conference—which permitted him to occupy the Sudetenland, the German-speaking region of Czechoslovakia. This was the beginning of his march toward the conquest of much of Europe.

Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, Hitler's very junior partner, had previously overcome determined resistance and conquered Ethiopia in his quest to create a "new Roman Empire." The only resistance to the forward march of fascism was the heroic defense of the Spanish Republic from the forces of fascist general Francisco Franco, but by the middle of 1938, the civil war in Spain turned in favor of the fascists with the extensive help of Germany and Italy.[2]

For many people, these fascist victories represented a darkening era. Others, however, were inspired by them. "Everywhere the fascists and their fellow travelers seemed to be riding high," James Wechsler recalled in his autobiography, *The Age of Suspicion*. Wechsler was making a living as a journalist in New York, writing for the *Nation* magazine. He was a former student leader at Columbia University and had just recently left the Communist Party. In the not-too-distant future he would gain fame as longtime editor of the then-liberal *New York Post*. Weschsler was particularly concerned with the street violence of the New York supporters of the Michigan-based fascist priest Father Charles E. Coughlin.

In the United States Charles E. Coughlin was intoning his hymns of hate to growing multitudes and the echoes of his message were being heard on the sidewalks of New York...Frankly emboldened by the Nazi successes, the Coughlinites for a brief period really appeared to be making headway in several neighborhoods; the street brawls, sluggings and anti-Semitic forays that we once stamped as strictly European were finally being enacted in our own country.[3]

This surge in fascist activity was not confined to New York City, then the most left-wing city in the United States and with the largest Jewish population in the world. All across the country, a variety of fascist and neofascist groups were crawling out from underneath their rocks, helped significantly by Coughlin's work and his famously booming voice over the radio. Whether they were called the Silver Shirts, the German American Bund, the Christian Front, or the many split-offs from these, all were emboldened not only by fascist triumphs in Europe but also by a sharp turn to the right at home.

"In the months since Munich and especially since the fall of Barcelona, and the definitive collapse of the New Deal policies, the fascist and semi-fascist movements in this country have been growing rapidly in numbers and boldness," the newly founded Socialist Workers Party (SWP) declared at its founding convention in January 1938.[4] This newly emboldened fascist movement, however, was met by growing and equally determined popular antifascist resistance.

The Silver Shirts

Minneapolis, Minnesota, from the turn of the nineteenth century until the mid-1930s was ruled by a ruthless business oligarchy known as the Citizens Alliance (CA). It successfully and boastfully kept the city free of any unions that could challenge their near complete domination of economic and political life.

The first crack in the CA armor came with the election of Floyd Olson, the Farmer-Labor Party candidate, as governor in 1930. The popular Olson personified the shifting political landscape of Minnesota produced by the Great Depression. Reform was in the air, and the CA could feel power slipping from their hands. Olson also broke the unspoken ban on having Jews play important roles in the highest levels of state government.

Teamsters Local 574, however, finally broke the CA's stranglehold on Minneapolis through a series of militant, extremely well-organized strikes that rocked the trucking industry in the late spring and summer of 1934. Within a few short years, Minneapolis went from being the open shop capital of the United States to being one of its best-known union towns. Teamsters Local 574 (later known as Local 544) was led by a group of talented and experienced revolutionary socialists—who were first members of the Communist League of America and then the SWP—that included Swedish immigrant Carl Skoglund, a young Farrell Dobbs, and the Dunne brothers, Vincent, Miles, and Grant.[5] The Dunne brothers especially elicited a visceral hatred from the bosses who literally growled at the mention of their names.[6]

The Minneapolis trucking strikes were a major event in the emergence of the militant industrial union movement of the 1930s and 1940s, and led to the organization of hundreds of thousands of truck drivers and warehouse workers. The success of the Minneapolis teamsters put wind in the sails of the entire labor movement across Minnesota and the Upper Midwest, a region still referred to at the time as the Northwest. Union organizers came from all over the country to learn their organizing techniques and strategies, including a young Jimmy Hoffa from Detroit.

The CA and its supporters found themselves on the losing end of the battle for several years following the 1934 strikes. They rechristened themselves the Associated Industries (AI) in December 1936 and made several failed efforts to hem in the militant teamsters and their radical leaders but nothing worked. The Farmer-Labor Party also continued to dominate state politics even after the death of Olson in 1936 from stomach cancer.

Olson's elected successor, Elmer Benson, embraced even more left-wing policies and continued Olson's policy of having Jews play a prominent role in state government and the Farmer-Labor Party. With the onset of the "Roosevelt Recession," many of Minneapolis's employers thought the ground had finally shifted in their favor, and some of them were quite willing to flirt with the fascist Silver Shirts to achieve their goals.[7]

Modeling his organization after Hitler's brown-shirted street fighters, William Dudley Pelley founded the Silver Legion of

America, popularly known as the Silver Shirts, the day after Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933. Pelley was, in many ways, a typical American religious crackpot, but he became a violent anti-Semite and Nazi, inspired by the success of German Nazism.

Pelley, himself, did not look like a menacing street fighter. With his graying hair, goatee, and pince-nez glasses, he looked like the aging choral director of a small Midwestern college. On formal occasions Pelley and his followers donned the official uniform of the Silver Shirts: navy blue trousers and black shoes. The distinctive silver shirt was emblazoned with a large scarlet "L" over the heart that added a slight varsity touch to the fascist-inspired uniform that stood for "Love, Loyalty and Liberty."[8]

Pelley, while in uniform, tried to strike the image of an old-fashioned cavalry officer. Soon after he founded the Silver Shirts in 1933 from his Asheville, North Carolina, headquarters, the organization grew significantly and peaked at a membership of around 15,000. From his headquarters Pelley edited *Liberation*, the Silver Shirts' national newspaper, and issued orders to his supporters across the country.

The Silver Shirts drew support largely from struggling and retired middle-class businessmen and skilled workers in the Midwest and West Coast whose lives had been thrown into turmoil by the Great Depression. They came from overwhelmingly white Anglo-Saxon, German, northern European, and Protestant ancestry. There was also a large overlap in some areas between the Silver Shirts and the traditional far Right racist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan.[9]

The Silver Shirts' menacing activities early on became the subject of congressional investigations. "Arms Plot Is Laid to San Diego Nazis" was the headline of the *New York Times* on August 8, 1934. Two marines, Virgil Hayes and Edward T. Grey, infiltrated the Silver Shirts at the behest of Marine Corps intelligence and revealed the "arms plot" to congressional investigators. Hayes testified before a congressional subcommittee in Los Angeles that the Silver Shirts had offered him money to purchase weapons stolen from military arsenals.

When asked by the subcommittee investigator what the purpose of the Silver Shirts was, Hayes responded, "To change the government, William Dudley Pelley, the national organizer told me. . .. He also planned to deport the Jews." The investigator then asked him if they advocated violence to take control of the government. Hayes answered, "Yes, I was commissioned as an instructor in military tactics with the Silver Shirts. I taught them the use of small arms and street fighting."[10]

Grey testified about a Silver Shirt plan to capture San Diego City Hall by force:.
It was planned for early in May [1934], when the Communists were to stage a May Day celebration. The Silver Shirts were ready, too. The 200 armed, trained Silver Shirts had orders to converge on the city from the outskirts. They counted on the Communists going in before them and taking the city by storm. Then, in the confusion, the Silver Shirts were to overthrow the Communists, their avowed enemies.[11]

The Silver Shirt "coup" failed because, according to Grey, the May Day demonstration was called off. How serious this plot was we will probably never know, yet the testimonies of the two marine infiltrators reveal an organization eager to obtain weapons, training, and the opportunity to seize power. There was no doubt that they were a dangerous organization to be on guard against.

Pelley's ambitions after 1934, however, were sidelined by the militant struggles of US workers, and the enactment of a series of historic social reforms by the Roosevelt administration that were embraced by a huge section of the population, including people that Pelley hoped to win to fascism. The Silver Shirts' membership slumped, after peaking in 1934, while Pelley became ensnared in a legal case after allegations of stock fraud. *Liberation* was even forced to declare bankruptcy.[12]

Starting in 1936, Pelley attempted to revive his organizing efforts. He founded the Christian Party, which he hoped would funnel large

numbers of men into the Silver Shirts, and ran for president.[13] Pelley's campaign battle cry was "Down with the Reds and out with the Jews." The campaign was a flop in terms of votes but it gave Pelley a somewhat more legitimate platform from which to espouse his political views.

It was in that same year that the Silver Shirts, according Minnesota historian Laura Weber, "first actively attempted to recruit members in the Twin Cities." They found fertile ground. Minneapolis had a long history of anti-Semitism. "Its peak," Weber argues, "occurred during the Great Depression."[14]

A young, eager reporter, Arnold Sevareid, who would many years later become a fixture of *CBS News* as Eric Sevareid, penned the first major exposé of the Silver Shirts in Minnesota. Sevareid wrote in his autobiography *Not So Wild a Dream*:

> Fresh from the theoretical battles of the classrooms, I was acutely concerned with the developing struggle in the country. When a couple of Communist acquaintances came to me with the information that a semisecret Fascist group, the Silver Shirt, were organizing widely in Minneapolis, I went to work.[15]

He went undercover for the *Minneapolis Journal*. Sevareid was a tall, lanky young man of Norwegian descent. He fit right in with the Silver Shirt crowd. Born in 1912 in Velva, North Dakota, his parents moved to Minneapolis when he was a teenager. He attended the University of Minnesota during a time of campus political ferment. He was an open admirer of Governor Olson and was radicalized by the 1934 teamster strikes.

His series in the *Minneapolis Journal* was the first major exposé of the anti-Semitic fascist activity in the state and was something of a bombshell. "Anti-Semitism is the outstanding feature of the Silvershirts," Sevareid wrote. He spent many "hair-raising evenings in the parlors of middle class citizens who worshipped a man named William Dudley Pelley, devoted to driving out the Jew from America." They claimed a membership of 6,000 in the state. "They sang the praises of Adolf Hitler and longed for the day when Pelley should come to power as the Hitler of the United States."[16]

"It was an unbelievably weird experience," he recounted a decade later.[17] At first Sevareid's editor refused to believe him until he was able to gain admittance to a Silver Shirt meeting. His editor returned to the office and demanded: "Get me a drink, quick! God, I feel I've been through the fantastic nightmare of my life." Sevareid "took them seriously, as a cadre of fascism, and we proposed to expose them in a series of articles." Somehow it was leaked to a group of "liberal rabbis and wealthy Jews" that the *Journal* was about to publish Sevareid's series, and the group asked the *Journal* to "withhold the story" fearing it would "abet a virulent form of anti-Semitism." Their attitude, Sevareid thought, could be summed up as, "It would be better to ignore the madmen and pretend they didn't exist."

Despite the opposition, his editor published the stories, "not as I wanted written, as a cry of alarm, but as a semi-humorous exposé of ridiculous crackpots who were befuddling otherwise upright citizens."[18] Nevertheless, after the first article appeared in print, the *Minneapolis Journal* sold several thousand extra copies above its regular distribution.[19]

What Sevareid wasn't prepared for was the unrelenting hostility that he received from the good Christian, middle-class readers of the *Journal*. "I was threatened by telephone and letter every day to such a point that my family was alarmed for my safety and my brothers wanted to sleep, armed in my apartment." He got no relief at work, "Odd characters, fuming and bridling, would march to my desk in the city room, and demand to know whether I was a Christian or a Bolshevik."

Self-righteous "lifelong subscribers" to the *Journal* would harass him on the phone, and when they didn't get the response they desired, they called Sevareid's publisher to complain about him and the Silver Shirts series. He was even denounced as a "Red" and "a foolish cub reporter" by the pastor of the biggest Baptist church in Minneapolis while he sat in the audience with his wife. Even his

wife wasn't very supportive. She turned to him and said, "After all, darling, you are a cub reporter, really."

Sevareid thought he was something of hero for the undercover reporting that he did, instead he was made to feel like an "ass."[20] It also demonstrated that a large pool of potential recruits existed for the Silver Shirts.

Political anti-Semitism

"A more violent threat to the Teamsters' union was organizing secret councils in Minneapolis during the summer of 1938," according to historian William Millikan. Millikan has written the only comprehensive history of the Minneapolis bosses' four-decade war against organized labor. "The fascist Silver Shirts had returned to Minneapolis."[21]

The Silver Shirt efforts benefitted greatly from an emerging split in the ranks of the Farmer-Labor Party (FLP). The sitting Minnesota governor Elmer Benson, who had been elected governor by the largest margin up until that point in the state's history in 1936, was being challenged for the FLP nomination by longtime rival, Hjalmar Peterson. Peterson "obliquely" used anti-Semitism to attack Benson, according to Minnesota historian Hyman Berman, whose staff included a number of Jews appointed by Olson. Benson won the FLP nomination but what Peterson had begun was picked up on and, later, brazenly used in the fall election.

The person who organized this was Ray P. Chase, "who was no lunatic-fringe anti-Semite, but was in the mainstream of Old Guard Minnesota Republicanism."[22] Chase's "Research Bureau" was financed by some of the biggest names in Minnesota business including Jay C. Hormel of Hormel meatpacking fame and George K. Belden, president of AI.[23] The stated goal of Chase's bureau was "to block the efforts of the present Governor and his communistic Jewish advisors to perpetuate themselves in power, [and] to block efforts to initiate and promote the Soviet plan of the Social Ownership of Key Industries."[24]

Pelley sent his top lieutenant Roy Zachary, officially designated by him a "Field Marshal" of the Silver Shirts, to Minneapolis. It was part of a three-and-a-half month, twenty-two state recruitment drive that he had methodically planned.[25] Zachary, however, came to Minneapolis with a dark cloud hanging over his head. He was, at the time, under investigation by the Secret Service for allegedly threatening the life of President Franklin Roosevelt at a May rally of the Silver Shirts in Chicago. "If no one else will volunteer to assassinate Roosevelt, I'll do it myself," he allegedly bellowed to a Silver Shirt audience in May. Zachary was dogged by these "false charges," as he called them.[26]

When he spoke in Tacoma, Washington, shortly after his Chicago stop, he complained that the CIO's *Timber Worker* newspaper, "with a large circulation in the Northwest, published an account of my speech and repeated the false charge that I had threatened to assassinate the President."[27] When he spoke on July 18 in Spokane, Washington, Zachary was annoyed that "people attending our meeting in Redmens' Hall had to pass through a street mob of several hundred Jews, communists and other radicals—sponsored by the League for Peace and Democracy—milling around the hall entrance with banners, blocking traffic, and otherwise demonstrating their determination to deny patriotic American citizens the right of free speech and peaceable assembly."[28]

Zachary pressed on. He was determined to demonstrate to "the Silvershirts and other decent Americans throughout the nation. . .that our meetings and our program are being conducted as scheduled and in spite of opposition on the part of Jews and communists."[29] Hundreds of invitations were sent out by T.G. Wooster, state organizer of the Silver Shirts, to Minnesota businessmen and professionals calling on them to attend Zachary's meeting in Minneapolis. Pelley wanted to recruit 3,000 to 5,000 new members to the Silver Shirts. This ambitious goal was to be done through a series of rallies at some of Minneapolis's best-known venues as well as through private meetings.[30] Pelley himself was expected to come to Minneapolis.

The first two meetings were held on July 29 and August 2 at the

Royal Arcanum Hall in Minneapolis. They were private meetings by invitation only. The invitation, in part, said:

> You are hereby cordially invited to attend another meeting of patriotic, Christian citizens who believe there is a very urgent need for united action on behalf of our Government.
>
> The Committee is pleased to announce that they were able to again secure the speaker [Roy Zachary] you heard on May 12th, who will return to our city for a one-night address, loaded with many new topics and additional information on relative alien forces that are seeking to undermine our government...
>
> Due to the growing interest in the movement it would be impossible to contact everyone in person as was done on the previous occasions. You are, therefore, requested to present this letter to the doorkeeper with an admittance fee of twenty-five cents...
>
> Any of your Christian, patriotic friends who desire to attend may accompany you and be admitted through this invitation.[31]

Among the many businessman and prominent political officials invited were Jay C. Hormel, George Belden, and Roy F. Dunn, the state secretary of the Republican Party. Zachary's contact list also included such old right-wing warhorses as James F. Gould, the head of the American Committee of Minneapolis in 1919, an organization that dedicated itself to eradicating radicalism in Minnesota in the post–World War I era.[32]

If there is an obvious overlap between supporters of Chase's Research Bureau and the mailing list of the local Silver Shirts, it doesn't appear to be an accident. Chase carried on "a long-time correspondence with William Dudley Pelley of the Silver Shirts. . .asking and receiving information regarding organizations and individuals."[33] His list of contacts also included A. C. Hubbard, president of the Mutual Truck Owners and Drivers Association, a company union affiliated with the AI, called Associated Independent Union (AIU).

The first meeting—on Friday night, July 29, at the Ark Temple—was the largest, drawing more than 350 people, including such "respectable people" as Dr. George Drake, a member of the Minneapolis School Board, and George K. Belden.[34] Drake and Belden's presence at a nasty fascist rally set off alarm bells for anyone concerned about the deteriorating political situation in the country and across the globe. (A more notorious example of an open show of fascist sympathy occurred the following day in Dearborn, Michigan, when the German government presented Henry Ford with the Grand Cross of the German Eagle, making him the first foreigner to receive such a medal from Hitler's government.)[35]

According to the *Minneapolis Labor Review*, the official organ of the Minneapolis Central Labor Union Council, Roy Zachary called for "Vigilante bands to raid the headquarters of Drivers 544, declaring that the time for the ballot was passed and the only way to deal with the unions was to raid their headquarters and destroy them."[36] The Silver Shirts were declaring open war on Teamsters Local 544.[37]

Newspaper reporters and photographers were barred from the secret, invitation-only meeting but word had leaked out that the Silver Shirts were meeting in the city, and they gathered outside the Ark Temple. As their rally came to an end, the dispersing audience had their pictures taken outside the hall. "The threat of having their pictures taken," according to the reporter for the *American Jewish World*, the weekly newspaper for the Twin Cities Jewish community, "is believed to be the reason for the small attendance of 65 at the next Tuesday meeting in the basement of the Royal Arcanum."[38]

If this is true, it reveals something of the soft support for the Silver Shirts. Conspicuously, however, George Belden was once again in attendance. Roy Zachary violently attacked what he called the "Communist racketeers of the Teamsters' Local 544." Zachary claimed to the August 4 meeting that the Silver Shirts were

"infiltrating" Minneapolis labor unions, including Local 544. Leaflets were handed out at both rallies inviting attendees to join the AIU's Mutual Truck Owners and Drivers Association Local No. 1, whose primary target was Teamsters Local 544.[39] At the end of both rallies, Silver Shirt guards attacked photographers. The *American Jewish World* reported that the photographers got the best of the Silver Shirts, especially after the second rally when "a fight followed during which a cameraman fell on his attackers with a blow to the chin."[40]

Trotsky's discussions with the SWP

How should the SWP leaders of Teamsters Local 544 respond to the Silver Shirts' menacing threats as well as the general resurgence of fascist activity? The SWP's thinking on this question was very much influenced by their discussions with the exiled Russian revolutionary leader Leon Trotsky in June 1938.[41]

Some of Trotsky's most brilliant writings had been about the rise of fascism in Germany and how to combat it, but his voice had been silenced in the mainstream communist and socialist movements and was only heard by a handful of people. Many of the most experienced leaders of the SWP, including James P. Cannon, Ray Dunne, and Max Shachtman had been in Mexico throughout the spring and early summer of 1938 at Trotsky's prison-like home in Coyoacan for extended discussions and formal meetings with him.

He and his supporters from around the globe were engaged in preliminary steps to create the Fourth International, an attempt to form a rival to the Stalinist Communist International and the reformist Socialist International, and had produced a manifesto, *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution*.[42] Most of their discussions revolved around how to implement the various parts of the *Transitional Program*, including how to respond to the resurgence of fascist activity in the United States.

Trotsky had recently read a book by an Italian worker published in France—a firsthand account of the brutal triumph of fascism in Italy. Trotsky wasn't impressed by the author's politics. "It is not his conclusions that are interesting but the facts which he presents." For example:

> He gives the picture of the Italian proletariat in 1920–21 especially. It was a powerful organization. They had 160 Socialist parliamentary deputies. They had more than one-third of the communities in their hands, the most important sections of Italy were in the hands of the Socialists, the center of the power of the workers. Then the author tells how they [the fascists] organized small bands under the guidance of officers and sent them in buses in every direction. In cities of ten thousand in the hands of the Socialists thirty organized men came into the town, burned up the municipality, burned the houses, shot the leaders, imposed on them the conditions of working for capitalists, then they went elsewhere and repeated the same in hundreds and hundreds of towns, one after another. With terrible terror and thus became bosses of Italy. They were a minority.[43]

In response to the fascist violence, the workers called a general strike and relied on their significant parliamentary presence to protect them from Mussolini's violent movement but to no avail:

> The fascists sent their buses and destroyed every local strike and with a small, organized minority wiped out the workers' organizations. After this came elections and the workers under the terror elected the same number of deputies. They protested in parliament until it was dissolved. *That is the difference between formal and actual power.* All the deputies were sure that they would have power, yet this tremendous movement with its spirit of sacrifice was smashed, crushed, abolished by some ten thousand fascists, well-organized with a spirit of sacrifice, and good military leaders.[44]

Trotsky warned the SWP leaders not to be deceived by the small size or local character of the fascist organizations. "A fascist wave can spread in two or three years."[45]

In Italy, and later Germany, the fascist movement went from a

marginal political force to holding the reins of state power in just a few years. The aggressive, bold, gangster-like behavior of the fascist squads in Italy and Germany contrasted sharply with the anemic response of the leaders of the Italian Socialist Party and the German Social Democratic Party, still the major parties of their respective working classes. Trotsky recalled, "Hitler explains his success in his book. The Social Democracy was extremely powerful. To a meeting of the Social Democracy he sent a band with Rudolf Hess. He says that at the end of the meeting his thirty boys evicted all the workers and they were incapable of opposing them. Then he knew he would be victorious."[46]

To defeat the fascists, Trotsky argued:

> We must do what Hitler did except in reverse. Send forty or fifty men to dissolve the meeting. This has tremendous importance. The workers become steeled, fighting elements. They become trumpets. The petty bourgeoisie think these are serious people. Such a success! This has tremendous importance as so much of the populace is blind, backward, oppressed, they can only be aroused by success. We can only arouse the vanguard but this vanguard must then arouse the others.[47]

But these workers' defense guards—be they armed with just their fists or clubs or more, depending on the character and scale of fascist violence—were not to engage in a simple one-to-one physical contest with the fascist squads. "Only armed workers' detachments," Trotsky insisted, "who feel the support of tens of millions of toilers behind them, can successfully prevail against the fascist bands. The struggle against fascism does not start in the liberal editorial office but in the factory—and ends in the street."

The SWP/Teamsters Union leaders in Minneapolis were very skilled and experienced trade union leaders who had built a militant union through bruising strikes and confrontations with scabs and the auxiliaries of the Citizens Alliance. The union's flying squads that were so effective in 1934 bore some of the features of the worker defense guard that Trotsky proposed.

Still, Trotsky's proposals were venturing into new and very controversial territory for them.

They asked very simply: "How do we go about launching the defense groups practically?" Trotsky replied, "It is very simple. Do you have a picket line in a strike? When the strike is over we say we must defend our union by making this picket line permanent."[48] Trotsky's use of "picket line" may not have been the clearest analogy at hand, or his belief that it would be a simple task revealed that he may not have understood the potential opposition to forming defense guards inside the trade union movement. With that possibly in the back of their minds, the SWP leaders asked Trotsky, "Does the party itself create the defense group with its own members?" Once again, Trotsky insisted:

> The slogans of the party must be placed in quarters where we have sympathizers and workers who will defend us. But a party cannot create an independent defense organization. The task is to create such a body in the trade unions. We must have these groups of comrades with very good discipline, with good cautious leaders not easily provoked because such groups can be provoked easily. The main task for the next year would be to avoid conflicts and bloody clashes. We must reduce them to a minimum with a minority organization during strikes, during peaceful times. *In order to prevent fascist meetings it is a question of the relationship of forces. We alone are not strong, but we can propose a united front.*[49]

Trotsky was optimistic. "In Minneapolis where we have very skilled powerful comrades we can begin and show the entire country."[50]

Teamsters versus the Silver Shirts

Belden's presence at the Silver Shirt rallies may never have been known to the wider population had it not been for the actions of Rabbi Albert Gordon of Adath Jeshurun Synagogue, one of the oldest and largest synagogues in Minneapolis, who first exposed him. "Thanks to Rabbi Gordon," reported the *Northwest Organizer*,

"the fact has become public that George K. Belden, head of AI personally participated in meetings of the Silver Shirts, the fascist organization which is preparing to carry out armed raids on union halls."[51]

The *Northwest Organizer* was the official weekly newspaper of Teamsters Joint Council but was largely the production of the staff of 544. Historian Alan Wald recalls his conversation about the paper with Farrell Dobbs, one of the most important SWP leaders in the Teamsters: "During the summer of 1934, [Herbert] Solow traveled to Minneapolis to edit the ORGANIZER.....Strike leader Farrell Dobbs...was listed as editor on the paper's masthead, but it was initially Max Shachtman, and later Solow, who actually put the paper out and wrote most of the articles that appeared in it."[52]

Gordon wrote a letter to the directors of Associated Industries asking for an explanation of Belden's presence at the meeting, and then released the letters to the press.[53] Whether Gordon had gotten his information from a sympathetic member of the audience or a spy who infiltrated the meetings is not clear. But what is clear is that Belden and the other AI executives were not happy about the public exposure of their seedy ties to the Silver Shirts. At first, AI took the position that Belden participated as an "individual," not as a representative of their organization.

Belden then let it slip that he had attended a Silver Shirt meeting out of "curiosity." A reporter from the *Minnesota Leader*, the weekly newspaper of the Farmer-Labor Association, now picked up where Rabbi Gordon had left off.[54] The *Northwest Organizer* continued:

> Under the skillful questioning of the interviewer it was revealed that not only had Belden attended the Silver Shirt meeting to which Rabbi Gordon called the attention of the public, but that he had also attended at least one other Silver Shirt meeting three months ago. Curiosity might have led him to one meeting, but once he saw what the organization was, why did he go to still other meetings? Why?

Why? For the simple reason that Belden found the Silver Shirts to his liking! Twist and turn as he might, that fact slipped through in the *Leader* interview. "They have some good things about (the Silver Shirts)." What things? Belden mentions one: "I am in sympathy with getting rid of the racketeers, employers and employees, whatever they are."[55]

What were the reasons that motivated Belden and the AI, an extremely influential employers' organization, to flirt with a relatively small fascist outfit like the Silver Shirts? The various "legal" methods employed by the Citizens' Alliance and their successor Associated Industries had failed at curtailing the new and militant labor movement led by Teamsters Local 544. This situation was made worse by the deepening economic crisis in the country. "The economic crisis continues," the *Northwest Organizer* declared,

> and the Associated Industries ever more grimly attempts to shove the burden of the crisis onto the backs of the workers. Other methods not having succeeded, they now play with the idea of financing a gigantic organization of fascist gangsters to physically smash the labor movement. Some employers think that the Silver Shirts is that organization, and are already financing it heavily. Whether Belden had definitely made up his mind to throw in his lot with this particular fascist organization, is not the decisive point. The main point is: BELDEN IS PLANNING TO USE FASCIST THUGS AGAINST THE TRADE UNIONS.[56]

The *Northwest Organizer* made an appeal to the broad membership of the Minnesota labor movement that was at the same time a warning to the Silver Shirts:

> On guard, brothers and sisters of the trade union movement! Guard well the portals of your unions against the fascist danger. Keep your eyes open everywhere for signs of the fascist storm troops. Prepare to deal with them as they deserve to be dealt with. Let every trade unionist say: "We shed our blood and gave our martyrs, to build our unions; we'll fight to the death to keep our unions."[57]

The leaders of the SWP and Teamsters Local 544 took the threats from the Silver Shirts seriously, but were the Silver Shirts' threats real or just big talk? From the vantage point of the SWP leaders of Teamsters Local 544, the threats were very real and credible. A month earlier, the *Northwest Organizer* (June 30, 1938) reported that Ralph H. Pierce, a leader of the Associated Independent Union, reported, "George K. Belden raised a pot of $35,000 to import gunmen to assassinate three leaders of Local 544." Pierce first reported this to L. Boerbach, a painters' union official, who then contacted the staff at Local 544 about the alleged murder plot. Pierce met with Grant and Vincent Dunne and Carl Skoglund on June 22. This plot was apparently too much for Pierce who broke with the other leaders of AIU, F. L. Taylor and E.T. Lee.

The murders were alleged to be committed the next day. Local 544 contacted the police who arrested Pierce but no others. The following day the police discovered a car near the Central Labor Union hall with two high-powered rifles with telescopic sights.[58] Mickey Dunne also reported that around this time persons unknown were following him, and that he had seen strangers lurking near his garage. The events in Pierce and Dunne's reports bore a strong similarity to the murder of Pat Corcoran, the secretary-treasurer of the Twin Cities Joint Council, on November 17, 1937. His murder remains unsolved to this very day. According to his grandson Doug Dooher, "A mobster hired by management interests. . .as he was closing the garage door [of his home], struck him on the side of the head, chased him into a neighbor's yard, and shot him behind his right ear."[59]

"This [the Silver Shirt threat] situation called for prompt countermeasures," wrote Farrell Dobbs thirty-five years later. "So Local 544, acting with its customary decisiveness, answered the threat by organizing a union defense guard during August 1938."[60] The SWP wanted the union defense to be a broad formation.

Conceptually, the guard was not envisaged as the narrow formation of a single union. It was viewed rather as the nucleus around which to build the broadest possible united defense movement. It was expected that time and events could also make it possible to extend the united front to include the unemployed, minority peoples, youth—all potential victims of the fascists, vigilantes, or other reactionaries.[61]

They were very carefully following Trotsky's advice. But they realized that they had to build a guard starting with Local 544, first. Ray Rainbolt, an organizer on the Local 544 staff and an SWP member, was elected commander of the force of six hundred union members. It was entirely made up of men. Rainbolt was an army veteran and was one of the few members of the SWP in Minneapolis who had military training.[62] He was the right choice for the job.

The Union Defense Guard (UDG) was divided into squads of five men each, each wearing "544 Union Defense Guard" armbands. Ideally, the UDG hoped it could mobilize at least 300 members once the call was put out, it took an hour to respond to any threat that required their services. Guard members drilled, and were educated, in Dobbs's words, "on tactics used in the past by antilabor vigilantes and fascists abroad."[63] Many of the guard members were strike-tested rank-and-file members of Local 544, but that experience was augmented by many who were "former sharpshooters, machine gunners, tank operators. . .. Quite a few had been noncommissioned officers."[64] It was not a group that would frighten easily.

The UDG tried as much as possible to be an independent organization from Teamsters Local 544 and the SWP. It "raised its own funds—for purchases of equipment and to meet general expenses—by sponsoring dances and other social affairs." It also made sure that "Members of the guard were not armed by the unions, since in the given circumstances that would have made them vulnerable to police frame-ups," according to Dobbs. Only two .22-caliber pistols and two .22-caliber rifles were purchased by the UDG for target practice during its entire existence. If the Silver Shirts were to follow through on their threats and more firearms were needed to defend the Local 544 hall or the homes of the teamster leaders, then the UDG members were expected to rely on their own weapons. "Many of them had guns of their own at home," recalled Dobbs, "which were used to hunt game; and those could quickly have been picked up if needed to fight off an armed attack by Silver Shirt

thugs."[65]

The requirements to join the UDG were few but important, and they included a willingness to defend all who may be potentially victimized by fascist groups and to take part in the minimal training required to have a reasonably well-organized guard. But in many ways the most important requirement was "acceptance of the democratic discipline required in a combat unit."[66]

It was impossible for Silver Shirts and their supporters not to have been aware of the preparations of the teamsters and the SWP—the *Northwest Organizer* publicized the UDG's activities for all to read. The September 8, 1938, edition front-page story was "544 Answers Fascist Thugs with Union Defense Guard."[67] It announced the guard's purpose was the "defense of the union's picket lines, union headquarters and members against anti-labor violence," and expressed Local 544's interest "in seeing other unions establish their own Defense Guards."[68]

In mid-September, the Silver Shirts announced another recruiting rally for Minneapolis. This time, unlike the July and August rallies, it was to be addressed by William Dudley Pelley himself.[69] Teamsters Local 544 was a popular union in Minneapolis. It had over 5,000 members and had many friends and allies among workers, radicalized students, and others who were impressed with their organizing abilities. It had many people who were willing to be their eyes and ears around the city.

The UDG took advantage of this by setting up an informal intelligence network of people to keep an eye out for Pelley and other known Silver Shirt organizers. "On the day of the scheduled affair a cab driver delivered Pelley to a residence in the city's silk stocking district," Dobbs recalled. "The driver immediately reported this to [Ray] Rainbolt, who telephoned the place and warned that Pelley would run into trouble if he went ahead. To show he was not bluffing, Rainbolt led a section of the union guard to Calhoun Hall where the rally was to be held that night."[70] The audience fled into the night with the appearance of the UDG, and Pelley was a no-show. Later, another cab driver called Rainbolt and reported to him that he had dropped Pelley at the train station to catch a train to Chicago.[71]

This quick victory over the Silver Shirts was more like a skirmish between highly uneven forces, the well-organized UDG versus the bluster and posing Silver Shirts. It didn't have the decisive quality of past battles that Local 544 had waged in the past, like the Battle of Deputies Run on May 22, 1934, when the striking teamsters destroyed the "special deputies" of the Citizens Alliance army, ending decades of tyrannical business rule in Minneapolis.

Yet, it is important to recognize that the Silver Shirts never again attempted to hold rallies in Minneapolis. They held one last rally across the river in St. Paul on October 28, 1938, that was heavily guarded by the police. Roy Zachary was the main speaker, and he boasted: "Leaders of 544 have said we cannot hold meetings in Minneapolis, but we shall hold them, with the aid of the police. The police know that someday they'll need our support and that's why they're supporting us now."[72]

That day never came. In response to Zachary's challenge, the UDG carried out one last mass mobilization when 300 members of the guard assembled in the center of Minneapolis in one hour for all to see. Dobbs sums it up well, "As for the ultra-rightists, they appeared to have gotten the union's message loud and clear. Zachary made no further attempts to hold rallies in Minneapolis; fascist propaganda tapered off; and after a time, it became evident that the Silver Shirt organizing drive in the city had been discontinued altogether."[73]

It can't happen here? (Part Two)[1]

IN DISCUSSIONS with his supporters in the United States, Leon Trotsky stressed the need to create union-based defense guards as a central aspect of a strategy for fighting fascism. This policy was implemented in only one city—Minneapolis, Minnesota—for a short period of time in the late summer and early autumn of 1938. Trotsky had hopes that the Teamsters Local 544 Union Defense Guard

(UDG) could become a model for organizing against the resurgen fascists to "show the entire country."[2]

Unfortunately, the Socialist Workers Party didn't have a base o support or the leadership of a local union anywhere else in th United States that approached that of Teamsters Local 544. Th broad Left and the left wing of the union movement, particularly th new militant unions of the Congress of Industrial Organizatio (CIO), were led by or heavily influenced by the much larger (an thoroughly Stalinist) Communist Party (CP), whose antifasci organizing was of an altogether different character.

In September 1933, eight months after Hitler was appointe chancellor of Germany, the CP founded the American Leagu against War and Fascism.[3] However, it was only after the Sevent (and last) Congress of the Communist International in 1935 that it parties were instructed to make the primary focus of Communi political work the formation of "popular or people's fronts" again fascism.[4] If in the previous period the CP had pursued a policy o ultraleft denunciation of all reformist and social-democratic partie as "social-fascism," this new turn lurched in the other directio marking a sharp right turn toward making electoral alliances wit reformist parties of the Left and parties of the capitalist class.

The revolutionary rhetoric of the Communist movement was tosse aside in favor of the nationalism and patriotism of their respecti capitalist countries. For example, Earl Browder, the gener secretary of the CPUSA, proclaimed that "Communism wa twentieth-century Americanism."[5] Underlying this shift in politica strategy was Russia's search for a military alliance against Na Germany, what became known as "collective security."[6] In line wit this change, the CP in the United States moved from sweepin denunciations of Roosevelt as a "social-fascist" to uncritical suppo for Roosevelt's New Deal. For CP-allied groups like the leagu though a very vigorous organization, it meant judiciously avoidin any activities that might make their Democratic Party allies blus with embarrassment. The league concentrated on educatio lobbying, and peaceful and legal picketing with a heavy dose of pr American rhetoric to counter domestic Nazis, fascists, and the apologists.

As the decade progressed, and as the fascists grew bolder, the tame tactics of the league appeared more and more out of touch with reality. A political space opened up for those who wanted to pursue more militant actions, including people who came to league-sponsored demonstrations, particularly against the most open admirers of Hitler in the United States, the German American Bund. When it came to the largest anti-fascist mobilization of the era—against the Bund at Madison Square Garden in February 1939—the CP and its allied organizations were absent.

The German American Bund

The German American Bund emerged by the late 1930s as "the largest and best-financed Nazi group operating in America," according to historian Warren Grover.[7] Its national membership peaked at around 25,000 members.[8] This was largely due to efforts of its leader Fritz Kuhn. Kuhn fought in the German Army in World War I, and when the war was over he joined the Freikorps, the paramilitary group of demobilized army veterans that violently suppressed the revolutionary workers movement in the early days of the German Republic. He joined the Nazi Party while a student at the University of Munich.[9]

When Kuhn assumed the leadership of the Bund in 1936, he was forty years old and had only been in the United States for eight years, having become a naturalized citizen in 1933. Like many aspiring Nazi leaders of the era, Kuhn tried to imitate Hitler in every way (excluding the mustache) even calling himself the "American Fuhrer."[10] Despite the many formidable obstacles to building a fascist movement wearing the swastika in the United States, Kuhn pressed ahead. As the decade wore on, the more diffuse and incipient native fascist currents were drawn into the orbit of the better-organized Bund.

The Bund modeled itself on the Nazi Party, with Kuhn as undisputed leader. His official title was *Bundesleiter*. The Bund created its own version of Hitler's SS—the Order Division (OD)—whose members

swore a personal allegiance to Kuhn. Bundists, as they were called, wore uniforms also inspired by the SS—a silver-gray shirt, a Sam Browne belt, black trousers, black shoes—with a swastika usually worn as a pin rather than an armband.

The Bund established a number of training camps, including Camp Nordland in New Jersey, Camp Siegfried on Long Island, New York, and Camp Highland in upstate New York. Their rallies were festooned with Nazi and US flags, and began with the singing of the "Horst Wessel song," the anthem of the German Nazi Party. Once the chorus ended, all would give the fascist salute and shout in unison "Heil Hitler, Heil America!"

The main speaker, usually Kuhn or his personal representative, would come to the microphone and shout "Free America" and the audience would return the call. Freeing America meant freeing it from "Jewish domination." Anti-Semitic and Nazi literature was bountiful at meetings and rallies, and after 1936, Father Coughlin's *Social Justice* magazine was conspicuously present. The Bund's first official announcement declared that its purpose was "to combat the Moscow-directed madness of the red world menace and its Jewish bacillus-carriers."[11]

According to historian Warren Grover, between 1936 and 1939 "[t]he Bund gained an increasingly prominent spotlight in the United States." Its leadership, however, remained "largely in the hands of German immigrants who had recently become US citizens or were becoming citizens so they could specifically work for Nazi Germany."[12]

For six months in 1937, the Chicago *Daily Times* had a team of three reporters assigned to investigate the Bund.[13] John C. Meltcalfe's fourteen-part diary of his experiences—"I Am A U.S. Storm Troop"—was serialized in the *Daily Times* for two weeks straight in September 1937. "We are not plotting a revolution," a Bund leader was recorded as saying. "But we are going to be prepared to wrest control from the communist-Jews when they start their revolution. We will save America for white-Americans."[14]

The *Daily Times* exposé, along with government investigations, fixed an image of the Bund in the minds of many people as a barely concealed army waiting for the right moment to strike. After the Munich sellout to Hitler, Kuhn and the Bund faced increasingly angry and militant crowds who were scrapping for a fight. This became glaringly evident the night of October 1, 1938—the day Germany annexed the Sudetenland—when thousands turned out to protest a Bund rally in Union City, New Jersey, and sent Kuhn running into the night for his life.

Union City and Chicago: Scenes from the frontlines

Kuhn was scheduled to speak at the local Bund meeting in Union City, a medium size industrial city with a large Irish and Italian population in Hudson County, New Jersey. The Bund meeting was held in the back of a building adjoining the City Hall Tavern, a well-known bar in downtown Union City. Kuhn arrived at 5:30 p.m. dressed in his Bund uniform. He was easy to spot. A lookout for the American League for Peace and Democracy (ALPD saw Kuhn enter the hall, and signaled to others to start the demonstration.

Nancy Cox a prominent anti-Nazi campaigner led this phase of the demonstration. Soon a crowd of about seventy-five people, ranging in age from fifteen to twenty years old, raised banners reading "Nazis Love War, Americans Love Peace" and "Fritz Kuhn Fights the Bill of Rights." They started picketing the meeting hall. Kuhn was in the hall for about forty-five minutes as the demonstration and crowd of onlookers—about five hundred to seven hundred people—began to gather across the street. Soon the crowd began to spill over into the street, and the league organizers decided to lead a demonstration to the side entrance of the building, chanting "Hitler Wants Peace, Piece by Piece" and "Deport Fritz Kuhn."[15]

Then a squad of veterans from the Andrew Jackson Veterans Democratic Club arrived on the scene. They had been holding their own meeting, according to the *New York Times*, across from the City Hall Tavern, waiting for the Bund to arrive.[16] The leadership of the demonstration shifted quickly from Cox and the ALPD to the veterans. Other veterans soon joined the crowd from the American

Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars.[17] Union City police chie Harry Jenkins led a contingent of seventy-five local cops to protec the Bund, but as the crowd swelled to five thousand people, i became very clear that the police were going to be overrun.

Around 5:45 p.m., a squad of veterans pushed through the leagu demonstrators and the police line protecting the meeting hall. Five o six veterans got onto the steps of the building and into th entranceway before uniformed Bund members and cops tossed ther out. The veterans regrouped across the street and then made anothe dash for the door. The cops, however, were prepared this time an stopped them in the middle of the road. The Union City cops the demanded a membership card from anyone who wanted to attend th Bund meeting.[18]

While the police were battling the veterans on the street, a larg number of people began gathering on the rooftops surrounding th meeting hall, arming themselves with bricks, stones, or whateve else was available to do some physical harm to the Bundists. Dow on the street, a paper and straw effigy of Hitler was carried into th crowd and burned.

Time was running out for Kuhn. Chief Jenkins went into the hall an told Kuhn that he needed to leave the area and that the police woul protect him. Jenkins told them to bring Kuhn's car around to the sid entrance. "Do you give me that order?" Kuhn demanded. "No, Jenkins told him, "it's a request from me. We've been decent to yo and now let's get out of here before there is trouble." Then a emissary from the veterans arrived and told him "if this place isn closed in half an hour we're going in there and close it."

Suddenly, a brick crashed through the window scattering glass ove the floor, very close to the table where Kuhn was eating. A youn Bund guard rushed to pull the shade. "Sit down," Kuhn barked a him. "Don't get excited." He was beginning to panic but chose to pu on a brave face for his troops. "I would not leave for nothing," h declared. "Not for 5,000 Communists. I wouldn't run away fro 10,000." When someone told him that there actually were 5,00 people outside, he quickly changed his mind. The moment h stepped outside the door, a deafening roar of boos came from the angry crowd, along with "Kill him!" and "Run him out of town!" Kuhn fled Union City and went to speak at more sympathetic venues in New Jersey and New York that night. The *New York Times* reported, "The local bund members made no attempt to hold their meeting, those in uniform donning civilian clothes before they left."[19]

Two weeks later on October 16, Kuhn got a similar reception in Chicago, when "more than 3,000 protesting men, women and children stormed a meeting. . .of the German-American Bund in the Lincoln Turner Hall, 1005 West Diversey Parkway," the *Herald and Examiner* reported.[20] The Bund was rallying to celebrate Hitler's conquest of the Sudetenland. Fifty cops were assigned to protect the meeting. When demonstrators arrived, they carried signs that read, "Save Czechoslovakia and Democracy," "Stop the Fascist Cancer," and "Down with Fascism." One anti-Nazi demonstrator displayed a handmade poster of Hitler's face attached to the body of a pig with "Portrait of a Dictator" written on it. The German American League for Culture (GALC) called the protest. Its national secretary was Dr. Erich von Schroetter, a German émigré who had taught at Northwestern University in nearby Evanston.

The GALC was the largest anti-Nazi organization in the German American community.[21] But numbers far beyond the membership of the GALC responded to the call, including members of Chicago's Communist Party and veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, who had just returned from fighting Franco in Spain. The meeting was supposed to begin at five o'clock but many of the Bund members and supporters got there earlier and the hall was filled by three o'clock. The early turnout probably was an effort to avoid anti-Nazi demonstrators.

Undaunted by the early turnout of the Bund and large police presence, four members of the GALC rushed Turner Hall carrying banners in German that read, "Let not yourself be betrayed. Fight against Fascism." They fought Bund OD men in the hallway; other demonstrators jumped into the fight, and it turned into a massive street brawl. The police called for reinforcements, and one hundred

cops marched from the Sheffield Avenue station half a block awa
The police waded into the crowd, wielding their clubs and pushin
the crowd away from the entrance to the hall, while demonstrato
pushed back and scuffled with police, chanting, "Down with Nazis.

The cops cleared Diversey Parkway, but Nazi latecomers to the ral
felt the fury of the crowd. "Two women started a near-battle wh
they walked toward the hall, shouting 'Hurray for Hitler,'" report
the *Herald and Examiner*. "Several policemen surrounded them
escort them to safety—while other women tried to seize the
clothing and tear their hair. Somewhat disheveled, the two quick
ran into the hall."[22] Then a dozen Bund members in uniform carryi
swastika flags came goose-stepping down the street with their ar
raised in the straight-armed fascist salute, crying, "Heil Hitler." T
demonstrators heckled, jeered, and insulted them as they pass
through police lines into the hall.

Four uniformed members of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade carryi
the American flag and the flag of the Spanish Republic led
contingent of one hundred people, singing the "International," a
tried to crash the police lines, but were pushed back by police.
"From the windows of the hall there came," the *Herald a*
Examiner reported, "faint snatches of three songs with which t
bund meeting was opened. They were the 'Star-Spangled Banne
the Nazi 'Horst Wessel' song and 'Deutschland Uber Alles.' T
street throng sang the National Anthem."[24]

Inside the hall, Fritz Kuhn spoke to three hundred of his followers.
was the second time in as many weeks that he had been confront
by huge crowds attempting to shut him down. Three weeks lat
Nazi savagery was taken to another level of barbarism, and ang
turned to fury and an aching desire for revenge against the Nazis.

Kristallnacht

On November 7, 1938, Herschel Grynszpan, a seventeen-year-o
Jewish boy, walked into the German embassy in Paris. He asked
speak to the ambassador, Count Johannes Von Welczeck. Soon Ernst Vom Rath, the third secretary to the German ambassador, appeared instead.[25] Grynszpan pulled out a pistol, fired, and mortally wounded him. The French police descended on the embassy and arrested Grynszspan. He shouted out, "Being a Jew is not a crime!" "I am not a dog! I have a right to live and the Jewish people have a right to exist on this earth. Wherever I have been I have been chased like an animal."[26] His family had been deported, along with ten thousand other Jews of Polish ancestry, to the Polish-German border in boxcars and dumped into a no-man's-land without food, shelter, or sanitation.

The Nazis thought that Herschel Grynszpan had provided them with an opportunity.[27] That opportunity was *Kristallnacht* ("the night of broken glass"), a pogrom ordered by Hitler and led by his propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, which resulted in the deaths of dozens of Jews, the destruction of almost two hundred synagogues, the looting and burning of Jewish stores and apartments, and the internment in concentration camps of twenty thousand Jews. [28] It was the most savage assault yet on the already besieged German Jewish community, raising Nazi cruelty to a new level.

On top of this state-sponsored murder and destruction, the Nazis imposed a crushing $400 million "fine" on the Jewish community. US public opinion and the press were virtually unanimous in condemning Kristallnacht with nearly 94 percent of Americans in one poll disapproving of Germany's treatment of Jews.[29] If the Nazis thought this was a propaganda opportunity. it massively backfired on them. Meanwhile in Paris, it was announced that Grynszpan would stand trial for murder.[30]

One week after Kristallnacht, Dorothy Thompson rushed to Grynszpan's defense. Thompson was, at the time, one of the most famous female journalists in the United States, if not the world. Her *On the Record* column was read by more than ten million people and carried by more than 170 papers.[31] She took to the airwaves to appeal for a "fair trial" for Grynszpan.[32] She recounted the horrible torment of his family as well as the millions tormented by the Nazi

regime. Thompson then asked:

> Who is on trial in this case? I say we are all on trial. I say th
> Christian world is on trial. I say the men of Munich are o
> trial, who signed a pact without one word of protection fo
> helpless minorities.
> We who are not Jews must speak, speak our sorrow an
> indignation and disgust in so many voices that they will b
> heard. This boy has become a symbol, and the responsibilit
> for his deed must be shared by those who caused it.[33]

Seven million people heard her broadcast that night, and th response, according to one of her biographers Peter Kurth, wa "phenomenal and she found herself directing the creation of a international fund for the defense of Herschel." In the first fe weeks nearly $40,000 in donations poured in.

She was joined in this enterprise by some of the most prominen figures in journalism, including John Gunther, Leland Stowe, edito Hamilton Fish Armstrong, Heywood Broun, Edgar Mowrer, Ramon Swing, and William Allen White; the Journalists' Defense Fund s up offices on Fifth Avenue in New York, dedicated to Grynszpan defense in particular and to the relief of Hitler's victims th country.[34]

Another voice was also heard on the radio, that of Father Charles E Coughlin, and it gave a very different message to millions of people The Canadian-born priest of Irish ancestry, Coughlin emerged fro being a little-known priest in Royal Oak, Michigan, to having a audience of tens of millions of listeners on the radio in the earl 1930s. Coughlin was tailor-made for radio with his rich baritone voice and an Irish brogue that he employed for great theatrical effec He became famously popular after the Wall Street crash of 1929 b attacking the "banksters" (a conflation of bankers and gangsters) When asked about the future of the country after the 1936 electio he replied, "I'll take the road to fascism."[35] And he did.

Coughlin took to the airwaves on Sunday afternoon on Novembe 20, eleven days after Kristallnacht and six days after Thompson broadcast. His sermon was highly anticipated. Coughlin's biggest audience was in the New York area over AM radio station WMCA. He began by posing three questions: "Why is there persecution in Germany today?" "How can we destroy it?" Why is "Nazism so hostile to Jewry?" He answered: Nazism was a "defense mechanism against Communism," and that the "rising generation of Germans regard Communism as a product not of Russia, but of a group of Jews who dominated the destinies of Russia."

He downplayed the theft of $400 million from German Jews by the Nazis claiming, "Between the same years not $400 million but $40 billion. . .of Christian property was appropriated by the Lenins and Trotskys. . .by the atheistic Jews and Gentiles." Coughlin cited a British government report that ridiculously claimed that the banking firm of "Kuhn Loeb & Company of New York, among those who helped finance the Russian revolution and Communism." He finished with a voice dripping with "sarcasm and facetiousness," according to sociologist and Coughlin biographer Donald Warren: "By all means let us have the courage to compound our sympathy not from the tears of Jews, but also from the blood of Christians—*600,000 Jews whom no government official in Germany has yet sentenced to death.* "[36]

Coughlin's "sermon" was outrageous, and the public backlash was strong. He admitted that "Nazi sources" were used for his sermon.[37] The *New York Times* correspondent in Berlin reported, "Father Coughlin is, for the moment, the new hero of Nazi Germany."[38]

"They are described as being pro-Jewish"

Kristallnacht produced a new organization mostly comprised of young Jewish men in Chicago. aching to take revenge for Hitler's crimes. The press dubbed them "the nameless organization." "Police were informed that a nameless organization of about 1,000 young men has been formed to oppose the two groups [the Silver Shirts and the German American Bund]," reported the *Chicago Daily Tribune*. "These men operate, it is said, in the manner of vigilantes, with word of mouth for action passing from mouth to mouth. They are described as being pro-Jewish."[39] They appeared on the streets in the

weeks following Kristallnacht, and they struck hard and fast, and their confidence grew quickly. Their goal—from their actions—was the destruction of the Nazi presence in Chicago. Their first target was the Silver Shirts.

Three days after Coughlin's radio sermon, the Silver Shirts scheduled a public meeting at the Engineer's Building at 205 West Wacker Drive in Chicago. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported that, "A clique of objectors, it was reported to the police, influenced the management of the building to return the Silvershirts' deposit for the rental hall." What form the "influence" took, we can only guess. Stupidly the Silver Shirts posted a sign redirecting attendees to a nearby tavern, where 150 gathered to listen to their "Field Marshall" Roy Zachary, who ranted about how "Jewish financial interests" control the country and pledged the use of armed force to aid the police in crushing "a Communist-Jewish revolution."[40]

While the Silver Shirts listened in rapt attention to Zachary, one hundred or more anti-Nazis gathered outside. "They wrenched open the doors, daring the Silvershirts to come outside. Their hoots and catcalls attracted a crowd of several hundred. As the meeting concluded the first Silvershirts to emerge were met at the door with blows and curses and the free for all ensued."[41] The *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported, "The Silvershirts' opponents, many of whom were Jewish, appeared to have no particular organization. One of those who urged them on from a perch on an automobile running board was Edward Lytton, 27 years old."[42] This appears to be the first action carried out by the "nameless organization." Among those who attended the Silver Shirt meeting was Bernard Voss, who called himself a "retired lecturer and teacher," and claimed to have attended out of "curiosity."[43] He was beaten by six anti-Nazis as he fled the meeting. Four anti-Nazis, among them Edward Lytton, and one Silver Shirt were arrested that night.

Two days later, the nameless organization struck again. This time their target was the German American Bund. On Friday night, the Bund was scheduled to hold a film showing and lecture at the German House Tavern at 5100 block of South Ashland Avenue in Chicago. The scheduled film was "The Meaning of Nov. 9, 1923," the date of Hitler's failed Beer Hall putsch, and the lecturer was to be Dr. Otto Willumeit, one of the leaders of the Chicago Bund. Five hundred to one thousand anti-Nazis stormed the meeting. "Rocks and bricks crashed through windows, a door was removed from its hinges, a brick smashed through the skylight and several men were beaten severely."[44]

Inside the meeting was none other Roy Zachary. "Don't tell those Jews outside I'm here," the *Daily Times* reported him pleading. "My life wouldn't be safe."[45] Over one hundred cops arrived, bringing along a fire truck ready to spray anti-Nazi demonstrators. The battle continued out in the street. There is a photo in the *Daily Times* showing eight young men gleefully burning a Nazi flag. Neither film nor the lecture took place. "Bund members were given safe conduct from the district in patrol wagons."[46]

Roy Zachary didn't seem to get the message. The "nameless organization" wasn't going to allow the Silver Shirts or the Bund to hold public meetings in Chicago. Despite being present at two meetings that were smashed up in the previous week, the Silver Shirts decided to hold another meeting, this time trying to conceal it from public attention. The invitation read: "Closed meeting for men only. To (name). You are invited to attend an address whose current important national matters will be treated by a well-known speaker at 5835 Irving Park Blvd., Monday evening, Nov. 28 at 8 p.m."[47]

One hundred Silver Shirts gathered at the meeting site to hear Zachary speak on "The Constitution of the United States," the usual cover for his anti-Semitic rants. Shortly after he started to speak, a convoy of one hundred cars, carrying five hundred people in all, arrived and parked far enough away so as not to be spotted by Silver Shirt guards or lookouts. "At 8:35 p.m., as Zachary was in the midst of his speech, the doors of the meeting hall flew open. A shouting mass of men charged in. In another moment, fists were landing on noses and eyes. A general melee followed. Men were knocked down and kicked. A riot call was sent out to the police."[48] Reihold J. Dobbertin, who said he was there out of "curiosity," later told the police, "While we were at the meeting, a mob suddenly broke open the front door, tearing it off its hinges. A group armed with rubber

hoses, baseball bats and sticks rushed in and started beating everyone in the place."[49]

Zachary was beaten down on the speaker's platform and suffered cuts and bruises to the head. Another of the meeting attendees, Clarence Sutherland, suffered a fractured skull.[50] "The meeting was the fourth assembly of Silver Shirts or the German-American Bund to be broken up violently in recent weeks," according to the *Chicago Daily Tribune*.[51]

The nameless organization disappeared as quickly as it appeared on the scene after Kristallnacht. It personified the desire for militant action against American Nazis, but because a larger institution didn't support them, they couldn't sustain their activities. The political heat was certainly building on the Silver Shirts and the Bund, yet the Bund persevered, lifted by Hitler's victories and the looming prospect of a fascist triumph in Spain. The Bund decided to make a play for the political big leagues, and announced that it would be holding a mass rally on George Washington's Birthday. In the face of this bold challenge, who would organize a mass counterdemonstration against them?

"Don't Wait—Act Now!"

Madison Square Garden, or the "Garden" as everyone called it, was by the late 1930s the most famous sports venue in the world. It was especially known for its boxing matches that were broadcast worldwide, but it also hosted political conventions, circuses, and was the site of many different types of political events over the years including pro- and anti-Nazi rallies.[52] It held a special place in the minds of New Yorkers and Americans.

To hold an event at the Garden bestowed a certain legitimacy on any event, and the ability to "fill" or not "fill" the garden was a sign of success or failure. So, when the German American Bund announced that they would hold a "Pro-American Rally" on Washington's birthday (they considered Washington to be "the first fascist"[53]), it produced a mixture of panic and anger. Historian Sander Diamond writes,

> No event in the history of the Bund movement made more obvious to a nationally conscious America the Nazi threat at home than did the widely publicized Pro-American Rally in Madison Square Garden on February 20, 1939. The Nazi menace was no longer viewed as an abstraction—a concoction of the Jews, the refugees, the Left, or the German haters; it was no longer merely a European concern.[54]

The planning for the largest fascist mobilization of the era began in November 1938, when Bund events were under siege in many cities and the Bund was low on funds. It had recently bought a tavern in the predominately German neighborhood of Yorkville in Manhattan. Initially, many other far right, anti-Semitic organizations wanted in on the Garden rally. This motley crew included Donald Shea's National Gentile League, the American Nationalist Party, the Crusaders against Communism, and the Christian Social Justice Party. Kuhn, however, decided it would be solely a Bund-sponsored event.[55]

The Garden was not owned by the City of New York, but it had a big say in whether an event could take place there or not. Initially, New York Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia came under some pressure to cancel the event, but he (and the American Civil Liberties Committee) "answered that it was the Bund's prerogative to exercise its civil rights."[56]

The Communist Party was the most likely organization to organize a counterdemonstration. The CP had its national headquarters in Union Square, and had nearly twenty thousand members in New York, plus a much wider circle of supporters. It led the anti-fascist American League for Peace and Democracy, and some of its members had fought and died in the Spanish Civil War. Yet it did nothing. In an interview in the "Questions from the People" column of the *Daily Worker* that appeared three weeks after the Bund event, V.J. Jerome,[57] the editor of *The Communist*, the CP's theoretical journal, responded to the criticism of the CP's non-involvement saying that "the Communists could not undertake to forcibly prevent such a meeting once the City Administration had allowed it."

Such a course, Jerome argues, "would have incited a direct collision not only with the Bund, but with the city administration and the police." Jerome noted that even peaceful picketing was ruled out by the CP. "A simple realistic view of the facts makes it obvious that such peaceful picketing would be an immediate target for the combined provocations of the Trotskyites and their companions in arms, the Bundists. The net result would be the same danger as before, feeding the Nazi objective of collisions between the Bund and the vanguard of the democratic forces."[58]

In the vacuum left by the CP, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) put itself forward as the main group organizing against the Nazi rally. The SWP had many talented people and was well known for its leadership of the 1934 Teamster strikes in Minneapolis. Its Minneapolis branch had also done an exemplary job at running Pelley's Silver Shirts out of Minneapolis the previous autumn. The SWP, a much smaller organization than the CP, faced a potentially daunting task. Trying to organize a massive counterdemonstration against the Bund with only three hundred members in a city of nearly seven and a half million residents spread over its famously large geography of five boroughs, would not be easy.[59]

Nevertheless, the SWP threw itself into the task mobilizing all of its members and resources, including the printing and distributing of two hundred thousand "Stop the Fascists!" flyers all over the city that exclaimed, "Don't wait for the concentration camps—Act now!"[60] One of the potential problems that the SWP ran into was the hostility of many of the organizations within the two million strong Jewish communities of New York City. Those organizations, allied with the Communist Party, the Socialist Party, or LaGuardia were hostile to even protesting the Bund rally and directed their members away from it. The *Forward*, one of the oldest and most widely read socialist dailies in New York, declared on the day of the Bund rally, "There can be no more shameful thing for the Jews and opponents of the Nazis than such demonstrations which will lead to bloody fights and riots. . .. Avoid the area around Madison Square Garden today and do not participate in any demonstration around the hall."[61] The Communist Party-controlled Yiddish language *Freiheit* didn't even mention the protest.[62]

According to Irving Howe, a young revolutionary socialist at the time and later a much more conservative cultural critic and historian, the "SWP leaflet calling upon people to demonstrate at the Garden was reproduced in the *Daily News*."[63] Newbold Morris, the acting mayor of New York (LaGuardia was conveniently out of the city), took the airwaves and appealed for people stay away, "The best way to show your support of our democratic institutions and of your concerns for the preservation of our democracy is to shun this assemblage as one would a pestilence."[64]

Despite such pleas, the planning for the Bund rally kept it in the news, and worked against the city establishment and its allies. The *New York Times* reported on the burgeoning police presence that grew from 1,000 to over 1,700 on the night of the rally, including many mounted-on-horse-back.[65] Howe remembered that Minneapolis Teamsters leader "Farrell Dobbs, came to New York to instruct us in the arts of street combat (wear a hat and a thick jacket, carry a rolled, heavy newspaper)."[66] Protecting themselves from the Bundists, their Christian Front allies, and from the police was a top concern.

New York Police Department (NYPD) officers, overwhelmingly Irish Catholic, were more than sympathetic to Father Coughlin's Christian Front. Police attacks on anti-Nazi demonstrators were expected.[67] "We have enough police here to stop a revolution," Police Commissioner Lewis J. Valentine boasted to the press, as he surveyed his "blue legions from the Eighth Avenue entrance to the Garden just before the meeting began at 8 o'clock."[68] The NYPD nearly turned Madison Square Garden, according to the *New York Times*, into "a fortress impregnable to anti-Nazis."[69]

The Bund transformed the inside of the Garden to mimic Nazi Party rallies. The walls were festooned with a multitude of American flags, swastika-bearing Bund banners, and a thirty-three-foot high painting of George Washington dominated the stage. All around the Garden balcony were Nazis propaganda banners reading, "Stop Jewish Domination of Christian Americans," "Wake Up American. Smash

Jewish Communism," "1,000,000 Bund Members by 1940."[70]

At 7:50 p.m., a fifty-member drum and bugle corps dressed in Nazi-inspired Order Division (OD) uniforms marched to the stage followed by a color guard of sixty flags, half US and the rest a mix of Nazi and Bund flags. They took their place behind stage and four hundred OD security guards marched down the aisles. All the top leaders of the Bund, led by Fritz Kuhn, took the stage. Speaker after speaker escalated their violent attacks on "International Jewry." The loudest applause came when Father Coughlin was mentioned.

The irrepressible Dorothy Thompson laughed during a speech by Wilhelm Kunze on "Race and Youth," whereupon a group of OD men grabbed her and had the police remove her from the Garden. Kuhn was the last speaker and he gave the vilest speech,[71] but before he finished, Isidore Greenbaum, a Jewish hotel worker who had bought a ticket, couldn't take it anymore and rushed the stage to attack Kuhn. He was violently tackled by Kuhn's OD men and beaten badly. He was then turned over to the police who beat him again. The crowd inside the Garden howled for Greenbaum's and Thompson's blood.[72]

Outside the Garden, the SWP was leading the largest anti-Nazi contingent at the corner of Fifty-First Street and Eighth Avenue, face to face with policemen mounted on horseback. The crowd was peppered with anti-Nazi posters and banners. Howe recalled that Max Shachtman, one of the most prominent SWP leaders, and other party spokesmen were hoisted onto the shoulders of husky party members, and "their piercing voices cracked the air with denunciations of Nazism," while "a parade of thousands stormed the streets."[73] There were nearly 50,000 surrounding the Garden and another 50,000 onlookers on surrounding blocks. Felix Morrow reporting for *Socialist Appeal* captured the diverse turnout:

> Among those who pressed against the horses, fighting for every inch of ground, were Spanish and Latin American workers, aching to strike the blow at fascism which had failed to strike down Franco; Negroes standing up against the racial myths of the Nazis and their 100% American allies; German American workers seeking to avenge their brothers under the heel of Hitler; Italian anti-fascists singing "Bandera Rossa;" groups of Jewish boys and men, coming together from their neighborhoods, to strike a blow against pogroms everywhere; Irish Republicans conscious of the struggle for the freedom of all peoples if Ireland is to be free; veterans of the World War; office workers, girls and boys, joining the roughly-clad workers in shouting and fighting; workers of very trade and neighborhood of the city.

Some of them brought home-made signs, eloquent of their anxiety to speak out. "Give me a gas mask, I can't stand the smell of the Nazis," read one, perched on the end of an umbrella rib. "Hitlerism is Political Gangsterism" read to others, identifying their bearers as "German-Americans of Yorkville." One group of Jewish-American World War veterans from Brooklyn brought a large American flag.[74]

Many were shocked by the cops' aggressive protection of the Nazis. Morrow overheard a young, naïve Jewish kid, stuck behind a police line trying to get to Madison Square Garden, say to his friends, "Help me get up to speak to the police for two minutes, they'll let us through if we explain that we just want to picket." Morrow, a few minutes later, saw the kid get trampled "under the horses' hooves."[75] Being a veteran didn't offer protection from the cops, as Morrow discovered when he followed the Brooklyn Jewish War veterans, one of most fearless contingents:

> With their big flag at their head, they marched to 53rd Street and 9th Avenue, then down to 9th Avenue to 50th and attempted to turn east toward the Garden. As they marched they sang 'Hallelujah' with its original pious words, and shouted to the onlookers: "All those who believe in democracy march behind the American flag."

As they tried to turn toward the Garden, the police stopped them.

Then the horses drove them on to the sidewalk, then followed them there—eight hundred mounted cops driving them down on the street like so many hunted animals. At 51st Street the cops wheeled and

came back at full speed, driving those who had hidden in doorways out into the open where they could ride them down again. Veterans fought back wildly and hard and gave the cops more than they took; at the end of the fight, their flag emerged with only tatters left on the flag-staff. The cops had torn it to ribbons. It was 9:15, two hours after the veterans had appeared. A lesson in democracy.

Despite the brutality of the police, the demonstration was an overwhelming success, beyond the wildest dreams of the organizers. The leaders of the German American Bund and their allies may have thought that their birthday celebration was a great success, but they grossly miscalculated. The Garden event was worldwide news but so was the huge outpouring against them. The Bund's offensive soon ground to a halt, and they were forced to cancel scheduled rallies in San Francisco and Philadelphia.[76] The political establishment began to move against it in their own way by investigating their finances. By the end of 1939, Kuhn was found guilty of embezzlement and on his way to jail.[77]

When Fascism was American (Part Three)
Father Coughlin and Donald Trump

The open racism and xenophobia that have characterized Donald Trump's presidential campaign, and perhaps provided much of its appeal, has been alarming. For a growing number of people, Trump's rhetoric is a sign of something deeper and more frightening: the growth of a fascist movement in the United States.

Ohio governor John Kasich—one of Trump's many rivals for the Republican nomination—produced an anti-Trump video that paraphrases Protestant theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer's warning about the Nazis. For many other commentators, as well, the violence Trump supporters have directed at critics during campaign rallies, along with the candidate's call for banning Muslims from the United States, are further confirmation that Trump is a Nazi. In the last Democratic presidential debate, former Maryland governor and presidential candidate Martin O'Malley denounced Trump as a "fascist demagogue."

Yet, on too many of these occasions, the fascist label has been reduced to a vague term of abuse rather than a bridge to a real political analysis of the underlying political forces that could produce a fascist movement in the United States. The US hasn't seen the stirrings of fascist mobilization since the late 1930s when mounting fascist victories in Europe galvanized its adherents in America, chief among them Father Charles Coughlin and his Christian Front. This history has something to offer us today.

Our Father

By late 1938, Nazi Germany and fascist Italy had shifted the balance of forces among the world's major powers, while fascist general Francisco Franco wrestled most of Spain from republican forces. The growing power of fascism was increasingly impacting civilian populations, particularly in Germany. According to historian Warren Grover:

> That year [1938] Germany demonstrated to the world that it would move with impunity in Europe and violate Jews' most basic rights: Jewish community organizations lost their official status and recognition (March); the registration of all Jewish property became compulsory (April); over 1,500 German Jews were arrested and imprisoned in concentration camps (June); Jewish physicians could no longer treat Christians (June); Nazis ordered the destruction of the Great Synagogue in Munich (July); All Jewish men were required to add "Israel" to their name and all Jewish women "Sarah" (August); Jews were barred from practicing law (September); German-Jewish passports were marked with the letter "J" for *Jude* (October); and finally *Kristallnacht* (November).

In the United States, the public and the press were virtually unanimous in condemning Kristallnacht, with one poll reporting that nearly 94 percent of Americans disapproved of Germany's treatment of Jews.

Yet despite Nazism's unpopularity, one voice took to the airwaves to

defend these actions — Father Charles E. Coughlin, a Catholic priest based in Royal Oak, Michigan. Coughlin was a popular radio personality with an audience of millions, largely concentrated in the northeastern United States, and in New York City in particular. In a highly anticipated broadcast that took place eleven days after Kristallnacht, Coughlin began by posing three questions: "Why is there persecution in Germany today?"; "How can we destroy it?"; and why is "Nazism so hostile to Jewry?"

Coughlin presented a simple answer: Nazism was a "defense mechanism against Communism," and that the "rising generation of Germans regard Communism as a product not of Russia, but of a group of Jews who dominated the destinies of Russia." In the broadcast Coughlin minimized the Nazi "fine" of $400 million on Germany's Jewish community with the claim that "between these same years not $400 million but $40 billion. . .of Christian property was appropriated by the Lenins and Trotskys. . .by the atheistic Jews and Gentiles" and accused the New York investment bank Kuhn Loeb & Company with helping to finance the Russian revolution and other Communist plots.

Coughlin's unapologetic Nazi propaganda inspired swift backlash. WMCA, the New York radio station that provided his largest audience, demanded to see his scripts in advance of any future broadcasts, and cancelled his program after he refused. Coughlin later admitted that he used "Nazi sources" in his broadcast. Following the broadcast, the *New York Times*' Berlin correspondent reported that Coughlin had become "the new hero of Nazi Germany." But Coughlin wasn't only a hero in Berlin; thousands of American supporters responded enthusiastically to his calls for militant action against "atheistic communism."

Coughlin began broadcasting from his Michigan church, "The Shrine of the Little Flower," in 1926, when radio represented a novel, thrilling experience for millions of people. With his rich baritone voice, and slight Irish brogue which he employed for great theatrical effect, Coughlin was made for the new medium. The 1929 Wall Street crash and the ensuing depression impoverished large parts of Coughlin's working- and lower-middle-class audience. In the wake of the crisis his broadcasts changed from religious sermonizing to political commentary that began with violent attacks on communism.

According to historian Alan Brinkley,

> [Coughlin] continued to dwell upon his abhorrence of communism, socialism, and "kindred fallacious social and economic theories," but [his broadcasts] also emphasized other concerns: Coughlin's fear that the selfish practices of "predatory capitalism" would drive Americans to embrace these pernicious doctrines.

As Coughlin attacked the "banksters" he blamed for the Great Depression, his audience grew massive. By 1933, the network of radio stations that carried his broadcasts reached a potential listenership of forty million.

In November 1934, Coughlin announced that he would organize his followers into a new political organization, the National Union for Social Justice. He denied that it was a third party even though it bore the hallmarks of every traditional American political party, and was organized by congressional districts. Coughlin waited for the right issue to flex the muscles of his new formation and got it in January 1935 when Roosevelt proposed that the United States affiliate to the World Court.

No president since Woodrow Wilson — for fear of provoking an isolationist backlash — had proposed the US make itself accountable to an international institution. A largely symbolic act, it initially appeared that Roosevelt would win the Senate majority needed to ratify the treaty for affiliation. Coughlin mobilized his forces along with other World Court opponents, including the mighty newspaper chain of arch-reactionary William Randolph Hearst. They overwhelmed Washington with hundreds of telegrams over one crucial weekend and defeated the treaty. A jubilant Coughlin declared that he intended to slay greater dragons. "Our next goal is to clean out the international bankers."

The phrase "international bankers" was a euphemism for Jews and was widely used in those years by numerous public figures including auto magnate (and fellow Michigander) Henry Ford, who bankrolled the distribution of anti-Semitic propaganda through his newspaper the *Dearborn Independent*.

Coughlin made the leap from antisemitism to open fascism after his political ambitions were crushed in the 1936 election. Coughlin had merged his National Union of Social Justice with the remnants of the late Huey Long's Share Our Wealth clubs, led by the anti-Semitic preacher Gerald L.K. Smith, and old-age pension activist Francis Townsend, in order to mount a third-party challenge to Roosevelt. The Union Party nominated North Dakota congressman William Lemke for president. Roosevelt, however, had shifted dramatically to the left during the course of 1935. In the face of failing New Deal policies and a huge upsurge in labor struggle, the president signed into law historic legislation including the Social Security Act and the National Labor Relations Act, the popularity of which undercut any electoral challenge.

As Lemke's campaign faltered, Coughlin grew increasingly agitated and vitriolic. "When an upstart dictator in the United States succeeds in making this a one-party form of government, then the ballot is useless," he asserted to an audience of twenty-five thousand supporters in Providence, Rhode Island. Coughlin declared: "I shall have the courage to stand up and advocate the use of bullets" and promised "more bullet holes in the White House than you could count with an adding machine." Winning less than nine hundred thousand votes across the country, Lemke went down in crushing defeat while Roosevelt secured one of the biggest presidential landslides in US history. With the election over, Coughlin announced that he would retire from the airwaves. Despondent, he confided to a reporter, "Democracy is doomed. This is our last election. . . It is fascism or communism. We are at a crossroads."
"What road do you take, Father Coughlin?" the reporter asked.

"I take the road of fascism," the priest replied.

The Christian Front

In the estimation of biographer Donald Warren, "it would not be until 1938 that [Coughlin] truly was able to recover from defeat." To an audience diminished but still numbering in the millions, he retook the airwaves emboldened by troubles for Roosevelt at home and the victories of fascism abroad. The short-lived economic recovery of the president's first term had been wiped out by a dramatic downturn. The "Roosevelt recession" brought mass unemployment and the forward march of the militant CIO was halted as factories and shipyards closed or laid off much of their workforces. Roosevelt's bungled effort to pack the Supreme Court with his allies provided Dixiecrats and Republicans cover to sabotage and roll back the New Deal. Meanwhile in Europe, fascism advanced.

Starting in 1936, Coughlin augmented his radio presence with the newspaper *Social Justice*, sold on the streets of major cities especially in the Midwest and Northeast. As Warren notes, "throughout 1937 and into early 1938, Jewish financial control became a regular theme of Social Justice. . . [Coughlin] printed his own version of the very centerpiece of anti-Semitic literature at the time, the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*." Coughlin also attempted to make an alliance with Mussolini, offering the Italian dictator space in *Social Justice* to defend the racial policies of his government. (He got no reply.) In addition to their fascination with Mussolini, Coughlin and *Social Justice* were fixated on the Spanish Civil War and General Francisco Franco's martial aura. They portrayed Franco as a hero defending "Christian civilization" from marauding communists.

The paper published lurid and false stories of Christians massacred by Republican forces, and baited American Jews for supporting the antifascist cause. Six months before Kristallnacht, he told his radio audience:

> If every reader of *Social Justice* formed at once a platoon of 25 or more persons dedicated to opposing Communism in all its forms, a Christian Front of 25,000,000 Americans would already be in action.

Coughlin claimed he was inspired to call for a "Christian Front" by the Communist Party's support for a Popular Front against fascism, but the call also evoked the "front line" of a war and his use of "platoon" left little room for interpretation. "Rest assured," he threatened his left-wing enemies in a later radio address, "we will fight you in Franco's way, if necessary. . . rest assured we will fight you and we will win."

Following Kristallnacht and the public reaction to Coughlin's commentary on Nazism, WMCA cancelled his broadcasts. In response, according to Donald Flamm, the owner of the Manhattan station, "several thousand people encircled the block where our studios are located, denounced the WMCA as un-American, and shouted its slogan of 'Don't buy from Jews,' 'Down with Jews,' etc." A memorandum of the American Jewish Council recorded "remarks uttered by the picketers. . . more explicit than the legends on the signs":

> Send refugees to Russia where they can be appreciated!
> This is a Christian country. Who isn't Christian throw them out!
> Wait until Hitler comes over here.
> Down with Jewish war-mongers.
> Heil Hitler!

Determined to punish WMCA, the Christian Fronters demonstrated outside the station weekend after weekend. In an autobiography written two decades later, Wechsler recalled,

> The Christian Front hysteria reached its peak in midsummer [1939]. There was a genuine fear that a fascist movement had finally taken root in New York, and that its counterpoint was developing in other areas under the stimulus of Coughlin's weekly sermons.

The journalist estimated that the Christian Front held thirty rallies a week throughout all of the city's boroughs, and attracted crowds as large as two thousand supporters. Jewish storeowners in Brooklyn and the Bronx faced regular Christian Front pickets. Gene Fein, a historian of Christian Front, notes that a typical street meeting began with the proclamation, "For Christ and Country, I open this meeting in the name of the Christian Front! The leader of the Christian Front is Jesus Christ." Queens Christian Front leader Daniel Kurz held regular public meetings in which he would address crowds with a paranoid mix of anticommunism, antisemitism, and xenophobia.

According to Fein, Kurz denounced the Russian revolution as a plot by Jews that slaughtered "thirty million Christians," and proclaimed an immediate mortal danger posed by Trotsky in Mexico, where he said the Russian revolutionary was building a secret army, ready to join American comrades and launch a communist revolution while the military was tied up in Europe.
The Christian Front also issued a "Christian index" listing preferred shopkeepers and stores, and street sales of *Social Justice* by Christian Front members provided an easy excuse to provoke fights or heckle anyone who "looked Jewish."

The heavily Irish New York Police Department and judiciary provided a supportive backdrop, going easy on Christian Fronters while leaning hard on antifascists. A rally of the Transport Workers Union — led by Mike Quill, the most high-profile Irish Communist union official in New York — was attacked and nearly broken up by rightist mobs. In August 1939, the hysteria spurred by fascist violence in New York reached its height as the Christian Mobilizers, an even more violent splinter of the Christian Front, took to the streets. *Harper's* journalist Dale Kramer reported that New York police recorded the Mobilizers holding fifty meetings a week in that month alone, drawing a total audience of more than twenty thousand.

Not to be outdone, the Christian Front called for an August 19 "Manifestation of Christianity" — a march from Columbus Circle to Union Square, well-known as the home of the Communist Party's national headquarters and many of the city's most prominent unions. "I was convinced that the so-called parade," reported John Roy Carlson, who gained fame with his exposé *Under Cover: My Four Years in the Nazi Underworld of America,* "would serve as the pretext for another bloody riot."

Coughlin disassociated himself from the demonstration only after intense political pressure was brought to bear from the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and Mayor La Guardia's office.
Despite spectacular street violence and the Christian Front's remarkable degree of organization, observers were divided on the meaning of the growing movement. James Wechsler cautioned at the time that "a picture of sustained terrorism blanketing the city would be a wrong one," and that "the Coughlin movement is still a 'fringe' affair; whatever mass sympathy it has evoked is of a passive sort, largely confined to the Catholic Church."

For a variety of reasons, including the signing of the Hitler-Stalin Pact and the growing threat of a European-wide war, the fascist threat began to subside after the terrible summer of 1939. But the period provides a vivid image of how a powerful, organized fascist movement could emerge in the United States.

Past and Present

here is much to distinguish Coughlin's United States from Donald Trump's today. The country is substantively more diverse than it was seventy-five years ago and the traumatic memory of the Holocaust still renders the open embrace of fascism a ticket to the margins of society.
Nevertheless, three decades of inequality and austerity have impoverished large sections of the American working class — along with declining US political prestige, bloody military adventures, and pervasive outrage at corruption in mainstream politics — have made a growing number of Americans more receptive to xenophobic and racist appeals that give voice to the powerlessness they feel in the face of hardship.

Trump has tapped into this anger and sense of powerlessness brilliantly. But is Trump a fascist whose real politics are being revealed drip by drip? Perhaps. His incendiary speeches have certainly drawn comparisons with infamous demagogues of the American past, including Coughlin. But more pressing than the question of which ideological label most precisely applies to Trump is the larger political force he heralds.

Many liberals and Democratic Party strategists are overjoyed at the light in which Trump's popularity has cast Republican presidential ambitions, and media speculation has focused heavily on his personal beliefs. The Left should avoid this lazy politics and focus both on the economic and political conditions that have created a massive and growing constituency that enthusiastically supports Trump's racist, sexist, and xenophobic worldview, and the potential emergence of a strong far-right movement independent of Trump. "We have been awakened," a far-right activist recently told *New Yorker* journalist Evan Osnos.

The past shows that the US is not immune to fascism. We must take the current far-right upsurge seriously and use every tool at our disposal to destroy it.

Endnotes

Part One

1. The title of the article is taken from Sinclair Lewis's novel *It Can't Happen Here*, published in 1935 about a fascist takeover of the United States. A stage version of the book, cowritten by Lewis, premiered in October 1936 in twenty-one US theaters in seventeen states sponsored by the Federal Theater Project.
2. The events described in this paragraph are found in most general histories of the Second World War. To understand the impact of the Munich conference on future events, see Telford Taylor's *Munich: The Price of Peace* (New York: Vintage, 1979). For a contemporary Marxist view of the Munich conference see the "After Munich" issue of the *New International*, November 1938.
3. James Wechsler, *The Age of Suspicion* (New York: Random House, 1953).
4. George Breitman, ed., *Founding of the Socialist Workers Party: Minutes and Resolutions 1938–39* (New York: Monad, 1982), 343.
5. US Trotskyism operated under several official political labels in the 1930s reflecting the strategic orientation of the movement. It was first known as the Communist League of America until 1935 when it merged with A.J. Muste's American Workers Party to form the Workers Party of the United States. From 1936 through the end of 1937, US Trotskyists entered and became the left

wing of the Socialist Party. This was known as the "French Turn," and they were known as the "Appeal Caucus." Throughout the fall of 1937, supporters of the Trotskyists inside the Socialist Party were systematically expelled, and US Trotskyists formed their own stand-alone party, the Socialist Workers Party, during a founding convention from December 31, 1937, to January 3, 1938, in Chicago.

6. The best account of the 1934 Minneapolis teamster strikes remains Farrell Dobbs's *Teamster Rebellion* (New York: Pathfinder, 1972). There was a fourth Dunne brother, William, but he remained in the Stalinist Communist Party, and was actively hostile to his brothers' leadership of the 1934 Teamster strikes.
7. For a wider lens on the background history of the Minneapolis teamsters strikes, the career of Floyd Olson, and the Citizens Alliance, see Charles Rumford Walker, *American City: A Rank and File History of Minneapolis* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005) and William Millikan, *A Union Against Unions: The Minneapolis Citizens Alliance and Its Fight Against Organized Labor, 1903–1947* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001). For Olson's relationship to the Jewish community, see Hyman Berman, "Political Antisemitism in Minnesota," *Jewish Social Studies*, Summer–Autumn 1976, 247–64.
8. Arnold Sevareid, "The Silvershirts Meet Secretly Here but Come Out Openly in Pacific Coast Drive," *Minneapolis Journal*, September 12, 1936, 1.
9. Leo P. Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998) and Philip Jenkins, *The Extreme Right in Pennsylvania 1925–1950* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).
10. "Arms Plot Is Laid to San Diego Nazis," *New York Times*, August 8, 1934.
11. Ibid.
12. "Silver Shirt Paper Fails," *New York Times*, April 25, 1934.
13. Membership in the Silver Shirts was confined to men but women could be members of the Christian Party.
14. For a history of anti-Semitism in Minneapolis, see Laura E. Weber, "Gentiles Preferred: Minneapolis Jews and Employment 1920–1950," *Minnesota History*, Spring 1991, 167–82.
15. Eric Sevareid, *Not So Wild a Dream* (*NSWAD*) (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1995), 12. His five-part series began on September 11, 1936, and was run on the front page of the *Minneapolis Journal*.
16. *NSWAD*, Sevareid, 69–70.
17. Ibid., 69.
18. Ibid., 70.
19. Ibid., 71.
20. Ibid., 71.
21. Millikan, 336.
22. Berman, 257. Peterson and his staff called prominent Jews in the FLP administration and party "Mexican Generals," an odd yet apparent reference to the nationalist generals of the Mexican government in the 1930s. My interpretation is that it seems to imply "unelected radicals."
23. George K. Belden was one of the seventeen founding members of the Citizens Alliance, Millikan, 398n28. For an overview of Belden's business and civic career see his obituaries in "G.K. Belden, Civic Leader Dies at 83," *Minneapolis Morning Tribune*, May 21, 1953, and "George K. Belden, 83, Mill City Leader, Dies," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, May 21, 1953.
24. Berman, 259.
25. Roy Zachary, "Zachary Sees America, Greeting Silvershirts," *Liberation*, August 7, 1938, 1, 2, 11.
26. "U.S. Opens Probe of Silvershirts, Anti-Jew Legion," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 23, 1938.
27. Zachary, 11.
28. Ibid., 11. The American League for Peace and Democracy was one of the largest mass membership political organizations initiated and controlled by the US Communist Party during the 1930s. Founded as the American League Against War and Fascism in September 1933, it claimed several million supporters across the country. In November 1937, it changed its name to the American League for Peace and Democracy. Its papers are archived at Swarthmore College, at http://www.swarthmore.edu/library/peace/....
29. Ibid., 11.
30. Millikan, 337.
31. Wooster's invitation is found in the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota Records, Minnesota Historical Society.
32. Millikan, 337. Berman, 258.
33. Berman, 259. The files of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota Records at the Minnesota Historical Society contains a master list of potential supporters of the Silver Shirts and other fascist groups, one list of hundreds of names is called "Key List of Subversive Suspects." How this list was compiled is unknown but likely included the infiltration of the Silver Shirt headquarters because two pages are marked "This list directly from Pelley's files (1936?)."
34. Millikan, 337.
35. http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nat....
36. "Labor Hater Belden with Silver Shirts," *Minneapolis Labor Review*, August 5, 1938.
37. Zachary's prejudices were an already established faith among the "respectable classes" in Minneapolis. Rev. George Mecklenburg, head pastor of the Wesley Methodist Church located in the then wealthy Lowry neighborhood of Minneapolis, held a virtually identical view. He had a weekly radio broadcast and column in the *Wesley News*. In his May 13, 1938, column called "Who Runs Minneapolis," he wondered, "Some say 544 runs this city. I do not do know first hand what 544 does, but I do know that there is much government by threat and force in our city." In the same column, he again wondered, "There are folks who say that the Jews run Minneapolis and they point out case after case where Jews are the owners of dives and places that violate the law." See the *Wesley News*, May 13, 1938. Ray Dunne, a prominent SWP and Teamsters 544 organizer, debated Mecklenberg over charges of "labor

racketeering" of Teamsters 544, See "V.R. Dunne Debates Rev. Mecklenberg; Defends Unions vs. Racketeering Charges," *Northwest Organizer*, June 30, 1938.

38. "Silver Shirts Are Organizing in Minnesota," *American Jewish World* (*AJW*), August 5, 1938.
39. Millikan, 337.
40. *AJW*, 1.
41. The SWP had previously discussed the fight against fascism at their founding convention in January 1938.
42. Leon Trotsky, *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution* (*TPSR*), (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973). For a contemporary account of the founding of the Fourth International, see Max Shachtman, "The Fourth International Congress," *New International*, November 1938.
43. "Completing the Program and Putting It to Work" (A discussion between Trotsky and unnamed leaders of the SWP) in *TPSR*, 139.
44. Trotsky, 139.
45. Ibid., 140.
46. Ibid., 141. Trotsky says "Hitler explains his success in his book"—a probable reference to *Mein Kampf*.
47. Ibid., 141. A survey of *Mein Kampf* doesn't reveal this exact example that Trotsky refers too. Hess isn't mentioned in Mein Kampf at all but there are many examples of Storm Trooper thuggery that are similar to the one Trotsky highlighted. Hitler refers to a "baptism of fire" for his Storm Troopers in November 1921 after members of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) attempted to break up a Nazi meeting that Hitler was speaking at following the murder of prominent SPD supporters. A relatively small number of Storm Troopers fought off a much larger of number of socialists. See *Mien Kampf*, http://www.greatwar.nl/books/meinkampf/m..., chapter 7, 409–13.
48. 48. Ibid., 140.
49. 49. Ibid., 140.
50. Ibid., 141. It is almost easy to miss when reading Trotsky's discussions with the SWP leaders that they never directly name the fascist and Nazi groups in the US that they might be confronting. Not the Silver Shirts or the German American Bund or even semi-fascist groups like the Klan. It is a very one-sided conversation with Trotsky doing most of the talking. Trotsky also gets some important things wrong about US politics. He thought FDR would not run for a third term, and that Mayor Frank Hague, the boss of Jersery City, N.J., was a forerunner of fascism in the US. Hague was notorious for making such declarations as, "I am the law!" But he lost an important Supreme Court case pertaining to the rights of unions to organize in his city in 1940. Soon after he reconciled himself with the CIO and the national Democratic Party. Interestingly, Trotsky said he had read Jack London's *The Iron Heel*, a fictional account of the rise of fascism in the US, and thought it "very interesting."
51. "Mr. Belden and the Silver Shirts," *Northwest Organizer* (*NWO*), August 11, 1938.
52. Alan Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 104.
53. Millikan, 337.
54. For a complete transcript of the *Minnesota Leader* interview with Belden, see "Attended Silver Shirt Meet," *Minnesota Leader*, August 6, 1938.
55. *NWO*, August 11, 1938.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. "Murder of 544 Men Planned, Is Charge," *NWO*, June 30, 1938.
59. Doug Dooher, "Who Killed Patrick Corcoran?" *Minneapolis–St. Paul Magazine*, August 1, 1998. Five months after Corcoran's murder, Arnold Johnson, one of the local union's organizing staff not affiliated with the SWP, was charged with the murder of Bill Brown, the president of the Teamsters Local 544, a close ally of the SWP. Brown had played a very public role in the victorious struggles of 1934 and was popular with the membership of the local. Many SWP leaders had a deep affection for Bill Brown. James P.Cannon, the national secretary of the SWP, recalled that Brown had a "big heart," and his whole life revolved around the union. His death really unnerved people. Over 10,000 people attended Corcoran's and Brown's respective funerals. Johnson was later found not guilty of Brown's murder. It should be remembered that the Communist Party, in one of its shabbier displays of slander and sectarianism, attempted to blame the SWP for the murder of Corcoran. See Carlos Hudson's "A Frame-up that Failed" at http://www.marxists.org/history/etol/new...
60. Farrell Dobbs, *Teamster Politics* (New York: Pathfinder, 1975), 141.
61. Ibid., 142.
62. Ibid., 142.
63. Ibid., 143.
64. Ibid., 143.
65. Ibid., 143.
66. Ibid., 142.
67. "544 Answers Fascist Thugs with Union Defense Guard," *NWO*, September 8, 1938.
68. *NWO*, September 8, 1938.
69. Millikan, 337–38.
70. Dobbs, 144.
71. Ibid., 144. I searched the mainstream press of the time hoping to find any reporting of these events but couldn't find anything.
72. Ibid., 144. A reporter from the *Minnesota Labor Review* infiltrated this Silver Shirt meeting and was roughed up by its guards. See "Silver Shirt Leader Poses—But Insists It's Un-American," *Minneapolis Star*, October 29, 1938.
73. Ibid., 145. Pelley told his demoralized supporters to support the Republican Harold Stassen in the coming election. He declared, "If it can't be done with ballots, now, there must be bullets later." Pelley's letter in the files of the Jewish Community Relations Council of Minnesota Records, Minnesota

Historical Society. George Belden and T.G. Wooster of the Silver Shirts were photographed together in late October. Wooster publicly endorsed Stassen for Governor. See "Backing Stassen, Silver Shirt Chief tells Leader reporter," *Minnesota Leader*, October 22, 1938.

Part Two

1. "Completing the Program and Putting it to Work" (a discussion between Trotsky and unnamed leaders of the SWP) in Leon Trotsky, *The Transitional Program for Socialist Revolution* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973), 141.
2. The founding document "Manifesto and Program of the American League Against War and Fascism" is available online at the Marxists Internet Archive. In a 1991 letter to the *New York Times*, American League for Peace and Democracy (ALPD) staffer James Lerner reported that among the founding members of the league were Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr of Union Theological Seminary, Rabbi Israel Goldstein of the Social Justice Commission of Rabbinical Assembly of America, representatives of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the War Resisters League, the Women's Peace Society, the Socialist-led League for Industrial Democracy, organizations of the unemployed and "the Communist Party, whose leader, Earl Browder, addressed that gathering along with the pacifists A. J. Muste and Devere Allen, William Pickens, field secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the union leader Emil Rieve." See "Brief History of an Earlier Antiwar Group," *NYT* letter, published January 28, 1991.
3. E. H. Carr, *Twilight of the Comintern 1930–1935* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1982).
4. There are many histories of US Communism; one of the best is Fraser M. Ontonelli, *The Communist Party of the United States: From the Depression to World War II* (New Bruswick, Rutgers University Press, 1991). For a defense of the CP's policies in that era see Philip Bart, *Highlights of a Fighting History: 60 Years of the Communist Party, USA* (New York, International Publishers, 1979).
5. The Franco-Soviet Mutual Assistance Treaty was signed by the foreign ministers of both countries in May 1935 and went into effect in March of the following year. The French Popular Front government, led by Leon Blum of the Socialist Party, came into office in June 1936.
6. Warren Grover, *Nazis in Newark* (New Brunswick, N.J., Transaction Publishers, 2003), 177.
7. Grover, 177.
8. Kuhn died an unrepentant Nazi in 1951. See "Fritz Kuhn Death in 1951 Revealed," *New York Times*, February 2, 1952.
9. Grover, 178.
10. Quoted in Ibid., 177.
11. Ibid., 175.
12. William Mueller, "How Times Men Got on the 'Inside of the Bund,'" *Chicago Daily Times*, September 9, 1937. The series ran from September 9, 1937 through September 24, 1937, including John C. Metcalfe's diary "I Am A US Storm Troop."
13. Mueller, "How Times Men Got on the 'Inside of the Bund.'"
14. "Jersey Veterans Rout Nazi Leader," *New York Times*, October 2, 1938.
15. I spoke to historian Warren Grover, the leading historian of fascism and antifascism in New Jersey in the 1920s and 1930s, and he has never heard of the Andrew Jackson Democratic Club.
16. The "anti-fascism" of the two hundred veterans appears to be largely motivated by xenophobia, at least from the *New York Times* account of a meeting held immediately after Kuhn was run out of town. "The veterans' meeting, long delayed, got under way a few minutes later with the crowd so dense in the small room, seating some 200 persons, that speakers addressed others in the street. The veterans granted the floor to Miss Nancy Cox, their organizer, and leader, but when she attempted to put forth a resolution condemning only Nazism, Charles Gilmour, past State Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, took the microphone away from her and accepted a motion to lay the resolution on the table. At the conclusion of the meeting, a resolution was adopted condemning all 'all isms except Americanism' and passed without a dissenting vote. The meeting ended with the singing of the national anthem." See "Jersey Veterans Rout Nazi Leader."
17. "Jersey Veterans Rout Nazi Leader."
18. Ibid.
19. "3,000 Storm Nazi Meet; Police Rush to Halt Riot," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*, October 17, 1938.
20. German American League for Culture Records at http://www.uic.edu/depts/lib/specialcoll....
21. "3,000 Storm Nazi Meet; Police Rush to Halt Riot."
22. Ibid. The Lincoln Brigade members were Sam Gibbons, twenty-three, Ernesto Romero, twenty-eight, Maurice Presser, forty-four, and James Robinson, twenty-eight.
23. Ibid.
24. William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1960), 430.
25. Peter Kurth, *American Cassandra: The Life of Dorothy Thompson* (Boston, Little, Brown & Company, 1991), 282.
26. The Stalinists thought it provided them with an opportunity, also. They tried

to smear their Trotskyist rivals ludicrously claiming that Grynszpan was a "Trotskyist" in league with the Nazis! See http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/.... Trotsky believed "Grynszpan is not a political militant but an inexperienced youth, almost a boy, whose only counselor was a feeling of indignation. To tear Grynszpan out of the hands of capitalist justice, which is capable of chopping off his head to further serve capitalist diplomacy, is the elementary, immediate task of the international working class!"

27. Grover, 237.
28. Grover, 237. Charles Lindbergh, the aviator, was made famous (and rich) by his solo flight across the Atlantic in 1927. He was showered with medals, including the Medal of Honor, and many awards. Lindbergh is a case study in the folly of making a hero out of someone whom you really don't know anything about. Lindbergh was a racist and a reactionary of the first order, whose views got progressively worse during the Nazi era. Lindbergh was in Germany in mid-October 1938, two weeks after the Nazis required all German Jews to have their passports marked with the letter "J"— for Jude (Jew in German). This didn't cause Lindbergh any discomfort. He was an official guest of the German government, inspecting the country's aircraft manufacturing facilities. Hermann Goering, Hitler's second in command, took the opportunity to award Lindbergh—on behalf of Hitler—the Command Cross of the Order of the German Eagle, the same medal given to Henry Ford in July.
29. Grynszpan actually never stood trial. He was later captured during the occupation and most likely died in a Gestapo prison but it is not certain. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herschel_Gr....
30. For Thompson's life as a journalist see Peter Kurth, *American Cassandra: The Life of Dorothy Thompson* (Boston, Little, Brown & Company, 1991).
31. Dorothy Thompson on Herschel Grynszpan in *Let the Record Speak* (Boston, Houghton & Mifflin, 1939), 256–60. It is a reproduction of the speech she gave on the radio on November 14, 1938.
32. Ibid., 260.
33. Kurth. 284.
34. Richard M. Ketchum, *The Borrowed Years 1939–1941* (New York, Anchor Books, 1989), 124.
35. Warren, 155–57.
36. "WMCA Contradicts Coughlin on Jews," *New York Times*, November 21, 1938.
37. Quoted in Warren, 160.
38. "Four Hurt in Riot as Rivals Raid Silver Shirts," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 29, 1938.
39. William Mueller, "Two Injured, 4 Are Jailed in Anti-Nazi Riot," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, November 24, 1938; William Mueller, "Air Silver Shirt Battle in Court," *Daily Times*, November 25, 1938.
40. Mueller, "Four Hurt in Riot as Rivals Raid Silver Shirts."
41. "Two Injured, 4 Are Jailed in Anti-Nazi Riot."
42. Mueller, "Air Silver Shirt Battle in Court."
43. "Bund Threatens Meet 'Riot' Action; 8 Anti-Nazis Go Free," *Daily Times* (Chicago), November 27, 1938, "Bund Foes Riot, 1,000 Raid Hall, Battle With Police," *Herald and Examiner*, November 26, 1938.
44. "Bund Threatens Meet 'Riot' Action."
45. Ibid.
46. "Anti-Nazis Raid Silvershirts; 4 Hurt in Battle, 9 Arrested," *Daily Times*, November 29, 1938.
47. "Four Hurt in Riot as Rivals Raid Silver Shirts."
48. "Anti-Nazis Raid Silvershirts."
49. Among the anti-Nazis arrested that night were Milton Marks, twenty-one years old, of 2751 North Whipple; Dave Forman, twenty-one, of 2525 Division Street; Max Kamm, twenty-one, of 2416 Cortez Street, Herman Lieb, nineteen, of 1544 Millard Avenue; Irv Botnek, twenty, of 1505 South Ridgeway Avenue, Seymour Brodfsky, seventeen, of 2905; Aaron Ragins of 3101 Augusta Boulevard, and Julius Rosenthal, twenty-two, a photographer for the *Daily Record*, both of 1838 North Halsted Street. All are young men, most with identifiably Jewish last names. The *Daily Record* might be a reference to the *Midwest Daily Record*, a newspaper of the Communist Party.
50. "Four Hurt in Riot as Rivals Raid Silver Shirts."
51. Madison Square Garden (1925), Wikipedia, available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madison_Squ....
52. Photos of a Bund meeting, complete with image of George Washington next to a swastika, from *Life* magazine's March 7, 1938 issue, http://books.google.com/books?id=vkoEAAA....
53. Sander Diamond, *The Nazi Movement in the United States: 1924-1941* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1974), 324.
54. Ibid., 325.
55. Ibid., 324.
56. For a short biography of Jerome see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V._J._Jerome.
57. Large sections of Jerome's March 8, 1939 interview in the *Daily Worker* were quoted in "The Best Way to Fight Against Fascism is to Lie Down and Make Believe You are Dead," by Felix Morrow, *Socialist Appeal*, March 10, 1939.
58. I estimated the membership of the SWP based on the number of members they reported for NYC at their founding convention in 1938, see *Founding of the Socialist Workers Party: Minutes and Resolutions 1938-39* (New York, Monad Press, 1982), 85-86.
59. The number of flyers that the SWP distributed was reported in the *NYT*, see "Bund Rally To Get Huge Police Guard," *New York Times*, February 19, 1939. "Stop the Fascists!" is in the possession of the author.
60. Quotes from the Forward and lack of quotes from the Freihiet are in "The Craven Jewish Press," *Socialist Appeal*, February 24, 1939
61. Ibid.
62. Irving Howe, *A Margin of Hope* (New York, Mariner Books, 1984), 41.
63. "Bund Rallies Amid Tumult At The Garden," *New York Herald Tribune*,

February 21, 1939.

64. "Bund Rally To Get Huge Police Guard," *New York Times*, February 19, 1939.
65. Irving Howe, *A Margin of Hope* (New York, Mariner Books, 1984), 41.
66. On the relationship between the NYPD and the Christian Front see "LaGuardia's Police," *Nation*, July 22, 1939.
67. "22,000 Nazis Hold Rally in Garden; Police Check Foes," *New York Times*, February 21, 1939.
68. Ibid.
69. "Bund Rallies Amid Tumult at The Garden," *New York Herald Tribune*, February 21, 1939.
70. Kuhn's speech can be heard at http://www.albany.edu/talkinghistory/arc...
71. "Bund Rallies Amid Tumult at The Garden," and "22,000 Nazis Hold Rally In Garden; Police Check Foes," *New York Times*, February 21, 1939.
72. Irving Howe, *A Margin of Hope* (New York, Mariner Books, 1984), 42.
73. Felix Morrow, "All Races, Creeds Join Picket Line," *Socialist Appeal*, February 28, 1939.
74. Ibid.
75. The SWP followed up their success in New York by leading five thousand anti-Nazi demonstrators against the Bund in Los Angeles, "Fight Nazis in Los Angeles," *Socialist Appeal*, February 28, 1939.
76. "Kuhn Found Guilty On All Five Counts; He Faces 30 Years; Leader of the Bund Here Will Be Sentenced," *New York Times*, November 30, 1939.
77. "Kuhn Found Guilty On All Five Counts; He Faces 30 Years; Leader of the Bund Here Will Be Sentenced," *New York Times*, November 30, 1939.